Thông Tin

Đường Dẫn/URL Mục Lục: https://novelhitam.com/series/i-became-the-last-place-in-the-academy/

I was the only one who knew that ahead lay the tragic end where everyone dies.
So, I desperately hoped that tragedy would turn into comedy.
Because I want you to smile.

Ch. 0 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 0

Cover View

“Cough, cough…”

My throat was constricted.

Not only was I suffocating, but the sensation of bl**d rushing to my head made me feel dazed. My eyes felt as if they were about to burst from the pressure of the rushing bl**d.

The rope around my neck was hanging from the ceiling, and my body was restrained to a chair.

It seemed like I wanted to separate my head from my body, and the sensation of being pulled up and down made me suffer. In such a state, I was dying without permission to scream.

My arms were tied to the armrests of the chair, and my legs were bound to the chair’s legs.

My nosebleed flowed and stopped repeatedly, and my whole body was covered in bruises.

It felt like my focus was fading. I thought it would be better to just d*e than to suffer like this.

My feet had been crushed by a hammer long ago, and it had been ages since nails had replaced my fingernails. Bound by a rope that didn’t quite k*ll me but offered no relief, I endured the pain over and over again.

I hadn’t received a mortal wound. I was just slowly dying, being eaten away little by little. Yet, it was torture that didn’t k*ll me but gnawed at my sanity.

“Ugh, eek, cough.”

It felt like my eyes were about to pop out, but before that, tears rolled down my cheeks.

If only I could be made comfortable, this strangling rope could become a lifeline, but the world seemed so cruel that it wouldn’t grant me that.

I’m in pain. I’m suffering.

k*ll me. I don’t want to live.

Save me. I don’t want to d*e.

I did something wrong. Save me. Please stop.

No, I didn’t do anything wrong.

Stop, stop. Ah, ahh.

When oxygen was running low, the rope around my neck would be loosened.

When I could finally breathe, water would be splashed on my head.

No food, no sleep.

Again and again, again and again, and again.

In the end, I could finally feel a bit at ease after being injected with a syringe filled with a confession agent.

Just a little bit.

“Ugh…”

I didn’t do anything wrong until the end.

I didn’t mess up.

Ch. 1 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 1

Cover view

I took a bite of the bread. The dry bread absorbed the moisture in my mouth, but it was okay since I had milk in my other hand.

Maybe it’s because there’s something even drier than the bread; this bread actually felt rather soft.

The world of meritocracy was more suffocating than I had imagined. I thought I could quickly make friends if I just endured for a few days, but it seemed that wasn’t the case.

Just as there exists a pyramid in the world, there was an invisible pyramid within this academy of which I was a part with the uniform I wore.

Perhaps because of that, without any ability to achieve good grades, I was crawling at the bottom and spending each day not being able to mix with the other kids.

Munch munch.

I picked up the bread quietly without making any rustling sound and bit into it, filling my mouth with it. I didn’t forget to sip the milk when my jaw started to ache from chewing.

I could understand why they wouldn’t be friends with me because I was at the bottom in grades, but my desperate heart seemed to have no way to cope

with how much I had to endure this. I had sat in the cafeteria thinking it was no big deal, but I had to be more aware of my surroundings.

“……”

Ah, the school I used to attend didn’t have kids ostracizing others just because of poor grades, but it didn’t seem to be the case here. They said the bottom would move.

“There are too many tests. It’s annoying.”

“Well, it can’t be helped… Sigh, but if you keep doing well consistently or improve compared to before, you can get assigned to a good place.”

“True. Considering how often you can turn things around… But what does the bottom one do to live?”

“Probably gets assigned to some rural area like a demotion.”

The kids from the other side had gone out laughing away, having come to the restroom to fix their makeup while just checking their reflections in the mirror.

The commonality between the top and the bottom was that both were at opposite ends of a group. Perhaps that’s why, unlike the top, the bottom was often mentioned by others.

The top was an object of interest and admiration, while the bottom became an example of disdain and avoidance. They shared precisely one commonality, but there were so many differences that it was rather tiring.

Still, it was unavoidable to feel upset. It was worse knowing I had to eat like this because of the watchful eyes around me rather than behind my back.

I thought about going up to the rooftop, but there were students there. I looked around for a hidden spot like a backyard, but it seemed a massive academy like this had none.

Seeing everyone else claiming their own hideouts, in the end, I had no choice but to take this place as my own hideout.

I quickly sipped the milk and swallowed. The sensation of the bread sliding down my esophagus felt laborious.

After folding the milk carton as much as I could and throwing it in the trash, I tentatively pulled out a few sheets of tissue to place on top of it. It was my own way of trying to hide it from sight.

As I washed my hands and naturally tried to leave my seat, I accidentally bumped into someone passing by in front of me.

"…Huh?"

Black hair and golden eyes.

It was Yoon Hamin, the protagonist of this story. A person equipped with innate talent and ability.

An existence at the top.

In contrast, I was an existence at the bottom.

"Oh, it's you…"

I hurriedly slipped away the moment I saw him.

I was afraid that if other girls saw me with the protagonist, they might say something bad, so I avoided the situation.

What I knew about the future was the fate of this world and the ending of the protagonist, not the ending of a bottom student that could provide no help, whether it existed or not.

What's the point of knowing the future? If I don't have the strength to use it.

If I could change it, it would be a blessing, but if I couldn’t, then this knowledge, which was a curse, approached me as a curse right now.

Since I was concerned about others’ gazes, it was problematic to approach the protagonist, and even if I did get close, I doubted he would believe me.

After all, who would believe someone unexpected running up to them saying that there would be a war in the future, and they wouldn’t be able to escape? Everybody would d*e.

I wouldn’t believe it myself.

It was a terrible curse, but it was still a blessing that allowed me time to think.

I walked down the corridor pressed against the wall.

The kids threw glances at me once before continuing to chat with friends beside them as they passed.

Initially, I couldn’t adapt, but now I had somewhat accepted it.

I accepted the fact that I was being ostracized.

It’s not like I could call them bad kids. Since this place assigned groups based on grades, there was a tendency for similar kids to bond.

Perhaps that was their way of saying, “Let’s keep our bonds strong.”

If I said that, maybe I should also belong to the bottom group, but being the unique bottom made me feel rejected even within that group.

Still, the feeling that I wasn’t as bad as the others was intensely felt.

“…Sigh.”

Even after sighing, time passed.

Lunch break ended, and classes began.

I encountered plain subjects like Korean, math, and history, but at some point, I also had to face peculiar classes like bare-handed combat, weapon skills, and magical theory.

There were times I thought I wanted to go back to my school days, but if it meant having to be an outcast in a changed form, I don’t think I would have wished for it.

Getting bored, I glanced at the window beside me.

I saw the view beyond the window at first, but my reflection gently shimmering also caught my eye.

Ivory-colored hair and purplish eyes.

I stared at it for a while, then felt another sigh about to come out and turned my head away.

“So this land has a history of countless battles…”

Some kids had already started dozing off.

Leaving those kids behind, I subtly turned my gaze.

I caught a glimpse of the protagonist Yoon Hamin.

He was the one destined for tragedy in the novel I had read.

Perhaps it was the author’s preference, but he was the tragic protagonist left alone after having his days that seemed only filled with happiness sullied.

Thinking back on losing what I wanted to protect, losing love, friends, and all, and recalling the loneliness of returning alone, my heart already felt heavy.

One by one, I tried to recall the tragedies I would gain from those around me.

And I would try to find ways to protect those things one by one.

Then at the very end, I might be able to prevent it from spiraling into a tragedy that seemed like it would be happiness.

It was just then that I was about to open my white notebook and write something down with a pen.

I noticed the heroine, Orca, glancing at me from next to him.

“…Huh.”

This felt like trouble.

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The moment class ended, a shadow of someone rushed towards me.

With a hand placed firmly on the desk where I was seated, the person spoke as if to announce, and it was none other than Orca.

“Excuse me, may I have a moment?”

“…Ah, yes.”

I nodded and followed her as she started to walk out first.

Though I knew I should put distance between Yoon Hamin and me, I felt uneasy about staring at him too intently during class.

Seeing that Orca called me, she must have been annoyed that I was staring so much.

Thinking that, I followed her.

The place we arrived at was the stairway halfway to the rooftop, a spot where few people came during break time.

I understood she wanted to talk in a secluded area, but the extreme sparsity of people made me feel unnecessarily scared.

Orca Lamiris.

Had there been no protagonist, she would have been the second in the academy.

“Kanna.”

The atmosphere revealing that she was truly the daughter of a high-ranking family made me feel overwhelmed unknowingly.

With slightly sharp eyes, she stared at me quietly.

Then, displaying a somewhat displeased expression, she spoke.

“…Why aren’t you paying attention? You’re at the bottom, after all.”

“Er, um…? Yes?”

I blinked in surprise, wondering if I had misheard.

But soon, I realized her serious expression was directed at me.

“What are you going to do if you’re at the bottom and not even paying attention in class? Even if you’re focused on individual ranks, please don’t do things that bring down the class’s average.”

“…But other kids are sleeping too…”

“……”

“Yes.”

Is a bottom student talking back? I kept my mouth shut and nodded.

Seemingly unsatisfied, Orca turned sharply and walked off.

Left behind on the stairs, I wore a blank expression.

I thought she might have come to scold me for staring at Yoon Hamin too long, but it felt odd knowing she had actually come to call me out for not paying attention as a bottom student.

What’s this?

All this time, I had been studying hard to know the extent of my abilities, that is, Kanna’s abilities, under the guise of reconnaissance.

Soon after, I recognized my limits and gave up halfway.

I thought that simply providing help to the protagonist or nearby individuals was the most feasible option.

Could it be that my sudden lack of studying has changed something?

“Uh… I really messed up.”

I muttered absentmindedly.

I was trying to proceed without disturbing the flow of the story as much as possible, and at a critical point, or perhaps at the very beginning, my plan was to stick close to the protagonist or heroine and offer help.

But it seemed something had already gone wrong due to my actions.

Right now, this wasn’t a game, nor a novel.

For me, and for them, this place was reality.

I was in a world where there weren’t separate branching choices, and I could react to every event.

But how could I know the daily behavior of a bottom student rarely described in novels?

Not knowing that made me feel that I was failing before I had even executed the plans I had devised.

The sound of branching paths splitting was probably just an auditory hallucination of mine.

But what do I do now?

Should I go back to studying?

Ch. 2 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 2

Kanna Aurora. That was my name.

But I didn’t know the original personality of the girl named Kanna Aurora. It was hard to figure out what she had been doing and what thoughts she had while attending this academy.

The house was too empty, and I was alone; even the thought of going to the academy made me feel like I was going to d*e from loneliness without any friends.

It was rare for me to talk to anyone, so I hadn’t opened my mouth much since coming here.

Even at home, I muttered to myself more than I listened to my changed voice.

So it was a problem.

This story was a tragedy where Yoon Hamin quietly left, having lost everything and saved no one.

In short, it was a narrative where everyone, including you, died at the ending.

Many people, including me, needed to change the ending to survive, and to change the ending, we had to change the outcome of the events happening in the middle.

That’s why I tried to recall the content and think of a solution, but the biggest problem I faced now was that I was already in a difficult situation.

After staring at Yoon Hamin for too long, I figured that the last-place student would be scolded for looking at someone, but I wondered if it was unusual to do so in the first place; instead, I heard a comment from Orca, who seemed to think like a top student.

It seemed she didn’t like that the last-place student wasn’t focusing on the class and was playing around, dragging down the class average.

So, feeling uncertain, I eventually picked up my pen and began to take notes diligently.

Did I really have to study even in a place like this? That question crossed my mind, but still, until the incident happened, I should follow the story in the same manner, right?

It wasn’t a turning point yet. Orca calling me out briefly wouldn’t be enough to change the story.

If I continued to make things unnecessarily troublesome for myself, there might be issues from that point, but for now, it wasn’t a concern.

It made me anxious. What if I studied so hard that I suddenly wasn’t last anymore? Could my being in last place affect the story? But it seemed like that wouldn’t be the case…

I seriously pondered whether it was okay for me to take the exam if I genuinely studied.

Was Kanna Aurora really not a fool? I repeated the notes while thinking like that.

As time passed, the class ended, and the bell that announced dismissal rang through the speakers installed throughout the school. While everyone was putting on their bags and leaving, I blankly looked at my notes for a moment before sliding them into my bag.

Then, Orca, who was sitting in front of me, glanced at me and chuckled. It felt like she wasn’t mocking me, but rather that she had led a foolish lamb to a good place.

And of course, being the heroine who pursued what was right just like the protagonist, it made sense.

At the same time, Yoon Hamin turned his head to see what Orca was looking at, and his gaze fell on me. Seeing that, I subtly shifted my position to avoid Orca’s watchful eyes.

However, as if he wouldn’t let it go so easily, he spoke up.

“You said your name is Kanna Aurora, right?”

“…Ah, hello.”

“…You don’t have to use formal language.”

Seeing me awkwardly speak formally, Yoon Hamin seemed flustered as he replied.

Not all classmates were friends. Since I had no friends in this place, it felt like there was an invisible wall. In other words, it meant there was no one to let their guard down with and speak comfortably to.

Since I couldn’t mix into the conversation, nobody cared whether I used formal or informal language, so it didn’t really matter. Though it seemed Yoon Hamin didn’t think so.

More than that, since he called me over, I thought he might have something to say.

It was Yoon Hamin, not someone else, who called me. I could have easily brushed him off, but I didn’t want to bring the ire of the other girls around, so I wanted to deal with whatever it was quickly.

“Can I ask why you called me?”

As I answered cautiously, Yoon Hamin seemed uncertain about whether there was anything in particular, stammering before finally opening his mouth awkwardly.

“No, just do your best.”

He offered me words of encouragement like that. Seeing that, it was hard for me to understand.

What on earth was that about?

I thought about whether this was how Yoon Hamin was originally, but thinking back to the early stages of the work, I couldn’t really remember, so I felt unsure.

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When I returned to the house I lived in, I placed my bag down on the empty floor and contemplated for a while.

What I needed to do from now on was to clarify things.

First, thinking about my situation, I was a poor person with little money, and I was at the bottom of the rankings in the academy, reaching the level of being an outcast.

Of course, Yoon Hamin and Orca seemed to show some interest in me, but that was undoubtedly because I had stopped studying and had begun studying again.

If that’s the case, there wouldn’t be anyone willing to listen to what I had to say about the future that lay ahead of me. It would be dismissed as an absurd story, nonsense.

I thought if raising my rank would lead the teachers and other kids to believe what I said, but it couldn’t be said to be completely good since the hostile forces would likely target the teachers and higher-ranked students first.

I was tormented. But again, the answer didn’t come out properly.

Kanna Aurora, the position I had was so miserable that no one would believe me or want to get close to me; it was close to being invisible.

Maybe that’s why, except for the nice protagonist and heroine, nobody was willing to speak to or look my way—leaving me feeling lost.

If I tried to stick to Yoon Hamin, I became afraid that I would be seen as the last-place student trying to cling to the top student for a rank elevation; would it be better to get closer to the heroine, who wanted to be friends with the protagonist?

“…How do I raise my affinity?”

The real problem was how to become friends. In fact, whether they were the top or second student, everyone was craving that network, so I questioned if I had any place in that.

Regardless of what I did, if I failed, everyone besides the protagonist would d*e, including the last-place student. When that thought arose, the only thing that remained was the notion that I had to steel myself.

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As soon as the next day arrived, I headed to the academy. While carrying my bag and spending the day without anyone speaking to me, I quietly approached the place where Orca was sitting.

“…Excuse me.”

“Yes?”

“Could you be my friend…?”

I mumbled that.

Normally, it was rare for me to open my mouth within the academy, but today, I had finally gathered my courage. Orca remained still for a moment

before giving a smile and responding.

“Sure. Let’s be friends.”

Hearing her voice as she answered with a smile made me feel a surge of emotions, realizing that my worries were unnecessary. Then, Yoon Hamin, who was sitting next to her, glanced at me and leaned slightly forward to look at me.

“What’s up? Did you just become friends? Want to be friends with me too?”

“Hamin, you…”

“It’s fine, right?”

“Well, I suppose.”

Orca sighed and closed her eyes, as if saying it wasn’t her concern.

I had approached Orca with the fear of being marked as a target of attention by others, but I couldn’t believe Yoon Hamin would also offer to be my friend without hesitation after Orca agreed.

“Nice to meet you.”

I caught a glimpse of the smiling figure. I saw that sight, but I couldn’t quite manage to smile back in the same way.

The gazes of the girls seated behind him felt a bit harsh.

I couldn’t understand why, since I had already determined Orca as my partner, you all were coming at me with such intensity.

“…Nice to meet you.”

I replied awkwardly to his words. Then, I moistening my dry lips with my tongue and returned to my seat.

My academy life, I had already escaped being an outcast. I had made a friend.

The problem was, even after making a friend, I didn’t know what to do next.

I had to be prepared for the monsters’ attacks and also deal with the schemes of the intelligent monsters. I was a bit hazy on the order of those events, so I frowned and racked my brain. I planned operations so I could respond to anything that came at me.

Since they were friends, should I trust my friend’s words to a certain extent? Would it be unreasonable to expect a level of trust like that?

While I pondered, I focused on studying during class to maintain my relationship with Yoon Hamin and Orca. They seemed to like someone who was putting in effort, so I thought this would satisfy them.

Having diligently studied until lunch break, I tossed my pen aside and let out a deep breath.

“Ugh.”

With the bell signaling meal time ringing, everyone rushed out. I hesitated for a moment and remembered that lunchtime was a pretty good time.

I recalled that I had thought of it as the time I ate bread in the bathroom, something I couldn’t bear to think of.

The break given between classes was too short, but lunchtime also left ample time for conversation after eating.

So ideally, it seemed beneficial to steer the conversation subtly without it being too blatant.

If even one of those things worked out, next time, whether it was Yoon Hamin or Orca, they might think I had a point, that I was trustworthy.

“…Huh.”

However, nobody remained in the classroom, and it seemed everyone had gone out to eat.

“……”

I already knew it. Just because I said I wanted to be friends doesn’t mean I’d truly become friends.

Standing there blankly, I quietly bought a pastry and entered the bathroom just like yesterday.

No, it wasn’t that I hadn’t become a real friend; maybe it would have been enough to suggest we become friends who eat together.

Ch. 3 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 3

Being alone was comfortable. I didn’t have to worry about anyone, nor did I need to adjust to anyone’s feelings. It was just about me, thinking only of my own feelings.

But when I saw other people gathering together and happily chatting, for some reason, I wanted to be part of that.

While I could feel calm thinking only about myself, it was hard to feel joy, and seeing others laugh made me want to experience that feeling too.

When was the last time I had friends?

The moment I graduated from school and jumped into society, I lost what friends I had.

As the time for contact decreased and the time to meet shrank, it was only natural that my friendships would fade away.

If this were work, I could just focus on my tasks and leave, but this was an Academy, not a workplace.

Everyone here was called cadets, and rather than discussing tasks, it was natural for them to engage in trivial chatter.

Perhaps because of that, I felt envious watching them, thinking that I wanted to join in too.

There wasn’t a place for me.

Nobody spoke to me, who was always coming in last in studies and training. Being an outcast in class, it was impossible for me to find a seat in the cafeteria.

Even though all the students ate in the same area, it wasn’t so spacious that I needed to avoid being seated. Hence, sitting alone felt like I was an unwelcome guest taking up space in a group.

So ultimately, I had to find a place of my own.

Being lonely was fine, but to end up in a situation like this after barely finding my own spot made me feel utterly miserable.

Even in a secluded restroom like this, people still came in.

Being a women’s restroom, it seemed more frequented for retouching makeup than for actual use.

Still, since I wasn’t here for that, it was fortunate that they didn’t know I was hiding in the last stall while eating my meal.

That was truly a relief.

“…Sniff.”

For some reason, I felt even gloomier today.

Maybe it was because I expected to eat with friends today, being filled with the thought of having made friends, but that wasn’t the case, which made my heart feel heavy.

Worried that I might make noise, I spoke softly, and I heard the voices of kids passing by.

It surprised me enough to make my heart race, but it was only natural that I didn’t expect anyone to find me here eating.

Swallowing hard, my expression turned blank.

I thought knowing the future would allow me to respond more flexibly, but realizing that wasn’t the case made me feel empty-headed.

If my position were even slightly higher.

If I had some middle ground where everyone acknowledged me, would they have listened to me?

But I wasn’t good at studying.

I could read and converse, but the studying here was too difficult.

I had to remember content completely different from the history I knew, and the common knowledge they referred to was something I could only gauge from the novels I read.

On top of that, my abilities were poor; earning points in practical tasks was out of the question.

Indeed, I was an outcast.

It felt like I couldn’t stop anything on my own, yet here I was, alone.

Was there anything I could do by myself…?

I firmly believed that knowing the future and acting in advance would be like having a cheat, but I didn’t feel a hint of that sensation, only a deeper sense of powerlessness.

Making friends to eat with would just be nice for me, improving my feelings slightly.

Thinking that, I threw my empty milk carton into the trash.

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Today’s afternoon lesson focused on utilizing our unique abilities and magic.

Each person had their own special ability they could wield, and there were spells they could use even if not born with them.

The lesson was about determining the limitations of our abilities and testing whether we could use them in real situations.

“Today’s lesson will calculate the limits of your abilities. There are training dummies set up in front, and we’ll see how much damage you can inflict on them.”

The dust-free, sparsely arranged space was a stark contrast to the concrete behind where five training dummies stood.

With a class size of twenty-five, everyone aimed to finish within five rounds.

“There are methods to increase potency and strategies to hit weaknesses. It’s not necessary to rely solely on power. So each will be scored.”

The teacher was gesturing with a pen toward the students.

“Shall we get started?”

At that prompt, five students surged forward.

They took positions in front of the training dummies and gazed beyond them.

While there was some distance, perhaps to assume the situation they couldn’t get close, the cadets here didn’t seem overly concerned with such things, summoning their utmost strength instead.

They breathed fire, shot water like projectiles, and those who could manipulate wind displayed their skills, knowing they were less adept.

There was even someone who simply rushed in and threw punches.

“Hey, isn’t there a long-range option?”

“Ah, sorry… I’m just good at punching.”

“Got it.”

The cadet walked by with a somewhat embarrassed expression.

Some dummies cracked, and the most severe results even led to partial destruction.

Whether he enjoyed that, the teacher hummed while bringing in another dummy.

“Great. Keep going. Everyone is doing well.”

As the teacher went on calling names, my turn came up impressively last.

I ended up standing alongside Yoon Hamin and Orca.

How did it come to this?

I was always the last and had no friends, so I had no reason to step forward like others full of cheer.

Thus, I was used to staying in the back, but for some reason, both Yoon Hamin and Orca were in the back row today too.

It felt oddly disheartening, remembering how swiftly the events passed.

“I’ll begin.”

With that statement, everyone unleashed their powers.

Orca was a girl blessed by the spirits of the earth.

As she squinted and gestured, the training dummy in her line trembled.

With a crack, the sound resonated, and the dummy shattered from the bottom up, scattering to applause from the onlooking cadets.

“She completely destroyed it! Just as I thought!”

“Wow.”

Most were exclamatory, but with around twenty people marveling, it became noisy.

And not long after, Yoon Hamin’s eyes shifted to an expectant shine.

Honestly, I should have wrapped up quickly at this point, but I found myself standing awkwardly without even scratching that dummy.

Could I just go back? What if that looked like defiance?

I had attempted to unleash my ability when Orca smashed the dummy, but I couldn’t make even a scratch.

I wasn’t able to take a step forward like some earlier cadets either.

While I was agonizing over that, Hamin’s hand glowed.

In the moment everyone watched in awe, a line shot out from his hand.

Its trajectory pierced through the dummy’s head, which could be called its weak point, leading swiftly to an explosion.

“…Amazing. Truly a top student! A direct hit with explosion…!”

The teacher clapped while glancing around at the other students.

Two individuals, who would have received praise if they were with other kids, looked a bit disappointed.

One had merely split their dummy in half, while the other completely pulverized theirs.

The problem was me.

As the other four wrapped up and returned to their seats, I stood stupefied, having failed to even graze a dummy.

“Kanna? Have you not done it yet?”

“…Ah, um, yes.”

I answered absentmindedly.

Maybe it was too embarrassing that while everyone had put in effort, I hadn’t managed to land a single bruise.

“You can wait until you’re ready.”

While the teacher said that, the kids behind me began to chatter, as if they had already finished.

They had all finished. Anyway, I was already set to be last.

I had tried once earlier and it had failed.

I reached out.

I wondered if this is how it’s done, gritting my teeth and exerting myself.

But what came out was merely a flicker of light.

Too small to be called lightning, yet too bright to be mere static.

It could well even be mistaken for static electricity.

That tingling sensation at my fingertips made me feel a bitter sense of defeat.

While I was the only one using my ability, the teacher, who wouldn’t have missed that brief flash, simply nodded.

“…If you don’t feel well, you can try next time.”

The teacher was being considerate.

Though the teacher was kind, of course I knew, and so did the children behind me.

It was impossible not to know.

As I turned with slumped shoulders, I felt their subtle gazes on me and hung my head low.

After all, it wasn’t the real me anyway; I just wanted to dismiss it.

But ultimately, it was me that was receiving that gaze, and I couldn’t help but feel overwhelmed.

Kanna Aurora.

I had never shown my true feelings in the story, never drew any interest, yet here, I couldn’t comprehend what emotions I was filling this space with alone.

Was it because nobody was on my side?

Perhaps neither outside nor inside the Academy did I have anyone on my side, which made me want to seek out a way forward after graduation.

I could feel my heart growing heavy.

I could endure if I wanted to, but I worried that by that time, I would be completely worn down.

Ch. 4 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 4

No one expects anything. It was a comfortable yet lonely story. The teacher and my classmates didn’t think I would achieve anything.

They formed a group among themselves, busy chatting and laughing as if I were so incompetent and harmless that I wasn’t worth their interest.

Watching them, I felt envious, yet somewhere along the way, I unknowingly came to accept that I didn’t belong in such a place.

They say people change according to their environment. Perhaps because of that, I grew accustomed to this situation, yet I also embraced the deepening loneliness with a painful heart.

I felt like I was nurturing a cactus in my heart.

“…Ah.”

I wondered if it would have been better if there were someone to listen to me, even if I was powerless. It didn’t take long for me to realize that was just a dream, and I quickly dismissed that thought.

Negative thoughts kept sprouting.

I pondered whether I could avoid the end of this story, where everyone except for the protagonist is annihilated, but no clear answer came. It was a story that Kanna Aurora could not navigate alone.

If I couldn’t even overcome the atmosphere of the academy, how could I possibly change the outcome?

There are monsters and there are heinous beings. I was a body that couldn’t fight against them.

What should I do?

Twitch.

So anxious that I gnawed on my nails. I was fine for now, but surely I had to change direction somewhere to survive. And finding that direction and having the strength to change was the key.

Would there be someone to lend me strength? Would I have to do everything alone in the end?

Just generating a bit of electricity wouldn’t do much.

As I was deep in thought, narrowing my brow, memories of the day at school surfaced. Although no one spoke to me in particular, I felt the occasional glances directed my way.

It felt like a panic was about to hit me.

No. No. After all, the gazes directed at me would soon d*e out. Everyone was probably just relieved to see someone less competent than themselves.

After all, the one lying at the bottom of the invisible pyramid must exist, and that was just me.

I calmed myself with that thought.

*

The academy frequently held tests. It was a school rule aimed at selecting those who could steadily rise in this dreadful world where monsters and heinous beings ran rampant.

In other words, they wouldn’t tolerate any last-minute cramming.

I was caught right in the middle of it and struggling with the exam questions.

In subjects like Korean or Math, I could accept it, but the story changed when it came to history.

For someone like me, who barely learned and memorized Korea’s medieval, modern, and contemporary history, suddenly being asked to memorize this world’s medieval, modern, and contemporary history was overwhelming, as I found I could remember so little.

It was as if I asked who built the turtle ship, and they answered Admiral Lee Sun-sin as if it were obvious—this history was common knowledge for them.

This was where my score was drastically cut. And the next exam was truly a tearful experience.

“The next exam subject is the ability test. Remember the training dummy smashing we did in class? You just have to do the same. Ah, but a different score will be assigned this time, so you have to try harder!”

The teacher shared this as important information and lined up the kids in order.

Fortunately, this time I could distance myself from the protagonist and heroine instead of breaking the line, but just because the gap with my comparison group had lessened didn’t mean I could even leave a scratch on the training dummy.

If the training dummy had consciousness, it might be pleased to know that there was someone who wouldn’t break it.

Boom! Screech! Crunch. Crackle.

Everyone used their abilities or magic to inflict harm on and break the training dummy.

Zzzzt.

This time, everyone seemed focused on the test; there were no chattering kids. So the clearly audible sound in that silence indicated that I had attempted once and failed.

Unlike before, the teacher's usual cover of "Do it when you're in top condition" wouldn't work this time. I returned to my spot, relishing the miserable feeling I had felt before.

I hadn't expected to feel that way again, but considering this was a regular class and an exam, the time ahead felt terrifying.

After all, I had never used such abilities or magic in my original world, so wasn't I just supposed to be somewhat satisfied that a bit of electricity came from my hands? Trying to console myself, I eventually realized it was all delusion and a foolish dream.

"The next test is a body techniques test. As I previously informed you, we will do an alternating attack and defense, with points for precise attacks and defensive rolls. If you do both well, you can earn points for both, right?"

The teacher said this while pairing us up. The last person left paired back with the first, but the problem was me.

My partner was Selena Erter. The girl with striking light green hair and a sharp impression looked ready to pounce on me. It seemed she aimed to score points by using me.

To be honest, I was a bit scared.

A roll? That was easier said than done, and it was unlikely that I could execute it properly. The first attack was given to Selena, and I hesitated momentarily, moving my feet cautiously.

As it was defense, I extended my arms, feeling as if I needed to touch my opponent's shoulder. The basic idea was for the opponent to grab it and throw the person.

I reached for Selena’s left shoulder. Instantly, her right hand grabbed me, and at the same time, her body swiftly spun half a turn.

The face I had seen moments ago had vanished to the other side, and suddenly my vision caught only the back of her head.

I need to react—

My vision spun, and soon my back hit the floor with a thud. I felt pain that made it seem like my back would break, utterly failing to enact a roll.

“Ah, ow…”

I squeezed my eyes shut. It felt like tears were welling up. As I lay there clutching my waist, Selena carefully helped me to my feet.

“……”

There were no words of apology. It was clear she wouldn’t show any mercy, thinking, “After all, it’s a test.”

“Ugh…”

Moaning in pain, I hastily fixed my gym clothes and rose to my feet. I tidied my disheveled hair, taking a deep breath.

“Now, it’s time to switch.”

Upon hearing the teacher’s words, the kids adjusted their postures and returned to their facing positions. I looked at Selena, who was in front of me.

This time, Selena extended her arms forward.

If my score was to be reduced, shouldn’t there be an opportunity to make it up? Thinking this, I bit down hard and desperately grabbed her arm.

As I turned my body quickly, whether it was due to my eagerness or a mistake in my stance, I should have thrown her over, but her body slipped

away instead.

Huh?

When I saw Selena elegantly rolling and rising, I was at a loss for words. It didn’t make the same noise as when I had crashed to the ground.

“……”

I couldn’t say anything and glanced at the teacher with trembling eyes. For a brief moment, our gazes met. The teacher simply avoided my gaze and jotted something down.

The moment I faced that, I instinctively understood. I hadn’t even performed the throw correctly.

Was it a lack of strength? Was it my stance? Or was it just that I had been overly eager?

Even though she had evaded my move, Selena would likely receive high points. In contrast to me.

Thinking that if I could just avoid being last, perhaps the gazes of those around me would change a little, I still tried hard, but it felt coldly imposed upon me that just because I tried hard didn’t mean the other kids would as well.

I felt despondent. Since these were frequent tests, I wanted to show the best version of myself, but it dawned on me once again that it was still a distant reality for me.

While Yoon Hamin and Orca elegantly threw people, even while being thrown, they seemed to twist their bodies to minimize the impact, which looked so beautiful, in contrast, I had poor abilities and magic, and I was clumsy to boot, enhancing my feelings of comparison.

I even wondered if it would have been better in a different class. But concluding that I wouldn’t be able to make friends that way, I found that line of thinking troubling.

The moral exam, akin to a liberal arts test, came and went quickly, but what was given to me after screwing up other exams was a broken average score.

Despite my determination to fix my perception, there was no power to achieve it, and the attitudes of those around me towards me did not change. They couldn’t change.

After the exam ended, lunchtime approached. As everyone compared their report cards, laughing and chatting, I sighed at mine—which represented a score that equaled a fraction of one.

If only I had put in a bit more effort, could I have reduced it by at least one point?

With that thought, I slightly lifted my head. It seemed that someone who ranked first in another class had an interest in Yoon Hamin and approached him. Watching them leave to eat made me feel alone again.

Having barely become friends, I felt a bit mournful that I still couldn’t even say let’s eat together. But looking at the crumpled report card with my head hung low, I questioned whether I even had the right to feel that way.

After all, in the original story, neither Yoon Hamin nor Orca had ever gotten close to someone like Kanna, so maybe living like this was the best thing after all.

As I consoled myself with that thought, I bought some bread again today.

Ch. 5 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 5

Creak, creak, creak.

It was getting closer. I had already taken the first exam.

I knew something would happen during the third exam, but I had no idea how to deal with it, and my anxiety only grew.

No one believed me.

No one would listen to me either.

I would have been grateful even for a pretense of listening; I had nothing.

The teachers were kind, but it was clear they would treat me as a failing student, which made everything feel increasingly vague.

Surely, in the beginning, I would manage to hold them off one way or another.

Of course, during this initial crisis, the protagonist would lose nothing.

After all, neither the heroine nor any friends would d*e right from the start.

However, it was hard to gauge how many unrelated people would d*e.

Just a single line written very plainly.

‘A village has collapsed.’

The academy had suffered losses due to the monster’s invasion, but I had to stop it from there.

By protecting one village, I might at least save a family of someone in the academy.

But how?

The story always revolves around the protagonist’s perspective.

In the end, what matters most is whether the protagonist gains something or loses something.

Since that village was not related to the protagonist, there was nothing to glean from the narrative.

Therefore, as someone who didn’t know how the village would collapse, I had no means to protect it.

It’s dangerous. The village is in danger.

If I just vaguely threw out that one line, who would believe me?

I wished someone would, but if someone did believe me, I would have to suspect that person because my situation was so dire.

“……”

Creak.

Nothing from the class was sinking into my head.

Right now, my mind was just repeatedly running simulations.

If I produced meaningful results in the next exam, surely someone might listen to me.

But when calculating my average grades, my abilities, magic usage, and

dueling skills were always dragging down my performance. There were limits to my efforts.

I seemed to be in a situation where I could do nothing but look weak, knowing that the world was crumbling while being impotently told to just d*e.

“Ah…”

I let out a small groan.

It seemed that no one could hear me over the loud voice of the teacher conducting the class, but my heart was so anxious that it felt like I made a loud sound in the silence.

What can’t I do?

Is there really not a single person here who would support me?

Certainly, I was ignored by the entire student body at the academy and marked as the number one target to avoid, but that was a matter among students, not teachers.

Even as a failing student, wouldn’t they listen to me if I spoke up?

If I just gave up from the start, saying it’s too unrealistic and that no one would believe me, it would be like throwing away an opportunity without even trying.

I stopped biting my nails, took a light breath, and waited for this time to end quickly.

The moment the bell rang to signal the end of class, I was planning to go to the faculty room and find my kind homeroom teacher.

*

And the hope I had was shattered, as expected.

“…Kanna, it seems I misheard. Could you say that once more?”

Break time at school was also a resting period for teachers.

Of course, for a teacher who hadn’t taught during the previous class, taking time for this would be no problem, but on the other hand, they might find it bothersome, or perhaps they wanted to spend even a little of that time resting with their own classes.

Not knowing the teacher’s class schedule, I felt slightly guilty.

However, rather than worrying about that, the teacher frowned and requested another explanation from me.

“…Well, we have another exam next week, right?”

“Yes.”

As I stammered that out, the teacher listened again, this time looking at me seriously as if trying to understand.

“At that time, the monsters will invade… one village will collapse. Over by that wall…”

Standing on the rooftop, I looked around, trying to indicate the exact location but ended up pointing towards the massive wall without being precise.

The teacher coldly stopped me, as if to say there was no need for that.

“Kanna.”

“Yes.”

I shrank back and lowered my head.

I understood, but I already knew it was hard to believe what I was saying.

I somewhat expected this reaction.

Maybe that’s why it didn’t hurt my feelings too much.

If only Yoon Hamin had said this, or even if a somewhat decent middle-tier student had said it, the situation might have changed.

“I understand that Kanna has difficulties following the class. Even if you gain abilities, those abilities may not always be strong enough to save the world. I can see why you’d choose to say this during exam time, but that simply won’t do.”

“That’s not it, really…”

I opened my mouth, feeling genuinely wronged as if I were clinging to the teacher.

What I received back was nothing other than advice directed at me.

“I worry that other teachers might get angry if you tell them tales like this, so I hope you can hold back. I’ve watched Kanna from the beginning, so I can understand and let it pass.”

Ah, it was obvious.

Because it was the day of the exam, I must have come off as someone faking illness.

Did I come off looking like someone who didn’t want to go to class and tried to imply it to the teacher, only to fail?

Given that my trustworthiness was low as the very bottom of the school ranking, such an outcome was to be expected.

“…I know you might hate this, but having exams every week is meant to provide cadets with more opportunities for growth. I hope you can escape being last place at least once.”

That was the teacher’s last remark before they opened the door and gracefully disappeared.

A sigh of relief escaped my lips.

Then I stared blankly at the view far away while holding onto the railing.

The bell signaling the start of class would ring soon, but I wanted to ignore that and closed my eyes, feeling the soft breeze against my face.

In the world I was in, there were exactly four exams.

The kids prepared desperately for those four exams, even pulling all-nighters the night before.

Some of the desperate studiers would slip and fail, while others who never studied would suddenly boost their grades through cramming.

That must be the system in place to prevent such occurrences.

And I resented that system.

How much better it would have been if exams weren’t so frequent.

The third exam. In two weeks, monsters and villains would invade.

Naturally, the academy would be safe. There were teachers and the protagonist.

But the surroundings slowly collapsed.

Crumbling, crumbling, crumbling.

Even the areas surrounding the seemingly unscathed protagonist were falling apart.

If something that looks fine is rotting from a distance, shouldn’t we dig into that first?

The time given to me was two weeks.

Even my kindest teacher didn’t believe me, and I might have become a shameless person trying to turn the test into a non-issue by faking illness, all while being the last in class.

With my trust, reputation, and value at rock bottom among the students, I pondered what I could do in two weeks to achieve meaningful results.

I hated it. I wouldn’t d*e immediately, but it felt like I was slowly dying, and it wasn’t a good feeling at all.

Knowing about an impending apocalyptic future I couldn’t handle was not fortunate.

If I suddenly claimed that the bottom student had come to say that a monster and a villain had come to destroy a village, nobody would respond with, “Oh, really?” and invest any resources in me.

“…This is driving me crazy.”

I was depressed. I understood what it felt like for no one to believe me, and at the same time, it felt utterly miserable that I couldn’t express this sorrow to anyone.

Today’s lunch, tomorrow’s lunch, the day after tomorrow’s lunch.

I would go into the innermost stall of a secluded restroom where no one saw me and eat my bread and milk.

While everyone else formed groups in the cafeteria, laughing and chatting, I would moisten the bread in my mouth to eat quietly, hoping no one would hear.

My lips trembled.

The bell for the start of class rang, but I didn’t want to return, so I simply gazed down at the scenery suspended before me.

“……”

Where should I say anything now?

Would anyone even listen to me?

If my last hope were cut off, it would be better to somehow do it alone.

But what could I even do by myself?

This was the first time I had a judgment call.

But I didn’t feel good at all.

Why did I feel this misery more intensely just because of the ambiguity of the exam in two weeks?

It was always filled with feelings of resentment.

Which village could it be? They say the collapsing village is near the wall, but there’s a village there and a village here, isn’t there?

I couldn’t just tell people living near the wall to run away!

I sat there blankly and sighed.

“…If I went once, what would I see?”

Murmuring this to myself, I suddenly heard a presence behind me.

“Calm down.”

“…?”

It wasn’t a teacher.

I turned my head, and there stood Yoon Hamin.

“…Calm down, and step away from the railing.”

Ch. 6 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 6

I didn’t dislike people without talent, but I hated those who didn’t put in effort.

Maybe that’s why. Even after giving Kanna Aurora a hint once or twice, I couldn’t particularly like someone who didn’t try. I just thought, “Oh, there’s someone like that,” and wanted to turn off my concern.

At first, I wanted to pay attention to her because it seemed like she was coming in last while studying, but after seeing her pretend to try once after Orca hinted at her, she quickly gave up and lost focus, which made me lose interest in her.

I just wanted to think of her as someone like that.

Someone who only bothered when given a hint, and after that, made no effort at all.

It was clear that a type like that would certainly make no effort once they went home. There was no way they would study at home if they weren’t doing it at school.

When Orca said she wanted to be friends at first, I thought, “Sure, let’s be friends,” but by the next day, when she showed a lack of focus again, I was rather disappointed and didn’t feel inclined to get closer.

If she wasn’t going to make an effort, she would manage on her own later. That was my dominant thought.

But then the problem arose during class.

“…Um, has anyone seen Kanna?”

It was the fact that there was an empty seat during our homeroom teacher’s class.

As soon as everyone heard the teacher’s words, they all turned their heads quickly. Most of them reacted with, “Oh, she’s not here?”

I thought the same.

I didn’t think I needed to care about it too much.

But I had a gut feeling that it was no simple matter.

“…Has she not come down from the rooftop?”

As the teacher’s voice caused a sudden stir in the atmosphere, I briefly raised my body. I thought I could catch someone trying to fall from the rooftop.

“I’ll go check.”

“Can you do that?”

Seeing the teacher’s pale face, it seemed like she was assuming the worst-case scenario. Orca sitting next to me looked no different.

Her trembling eyes glanced at me once, then she fell silent.

Ignoring that gaze, I ran out of the classroom with the teacher’s consent and dashed for the stairs.

Was she contemplating an extreme choice due to being in last place? Surely she wouldn’t do that.

As I tried to turn my thoughts away from the worst-case scenario yet couldn’t shake that ominous thought, I quickly climbed and opened the door leading to the rooftop a little to peek inside.

Kanna Aurora, holding onto the railing, was quietly murmuring.

“…If I go once, what will I see?”

My heart raced.

It felt like the behavior of someone just about to jump, and I was scared. Was it because I had never seen someone attempt to take their own life?

Hearing that voice, I kicked the door I was holding and shouted.

“Calm down. Just calm down, and step away from the railing.”

Kanna stared blankly at me before turning her gaze back to the railing she was holding onto. Then she responded softly.

“…What does it matter what I do?”

Her retort stiffened my body.

I knew what she said was true; it didn’t matter what she did. But that was something applicable in normal circumstances. It wasn’t appropriate to say that when someone was about to d*e.

I trembled my lips.

Avoiding her purplish eyes, I turned my gaze elsewhere. The railing; I could probably save her even if she threw herself over it.

Thinking that, I swallowed hard. I even resolved to do my best to prevent her from falling.

—

Was she thinking I would throw myself from here when she said to step away from the railing?

I wanted to live, and I didn’t want this conclusion to be tragic, so the thought of s*icide was absurd.

As I thought this, I found it absurd enough to make me laugh. I was so depressed that I dragged the protagonist into nonsensical thoughts, and that didn’t sit well with me at all.

I was feeling down. Not knowing what I wanted, feeling like a fool for not being certain about myself made me even sadder.

I wanted to do well.

When I read this story, I wanted to somehow navigate through the trials given to the protagonist using only what was assigned to them.

But it seemed I couldn’t do that.

I should just grit my teeth and get through it, but being ignored by everyone and laughed at was too hard for me to endure. I couldn’t withstand it like the protagonist.

I felt self-loathing. I didn’t want to blame anyone for that.

I had snapped back, saying, “What does it matter?” but in the end, it was all my fault. If someone in last place was standing holding onto the railing, it could look like they wanted to commit s*icide.

As I caressed the railing that I was holding onto, Hamin stood facing me and spoke soothingly.

“…What do you mean, ‘What does it matter’? You can’t just look at this and say nothing…”

With his voice faltering, I slumped my shoulders.

Fighting with Yoon Hamin here would yield no positive result, so I let go of the railing.

“Maybe.”

I didn’t have anything to say. It was a reasonable response. I knew that arguing about it here would only lead to a messy dispute stained with my

conflicting emotions.

I didn’t particularly want to d*e, so there was no compelling reason to endure it.

“…You thought well.”

“Yoon Hamin.”

I spoke the name of Yoon Hamin, who seemed relieved.

Honestly, I wasn’t holding much hope. It was obvious that both the teacher and students would turn their gaze away from me, and any words I said would be dismissed as nonsense, so it was better that I didn’t get my hopes up because that would only hurt me more.

Still, there were so many things I hadn’t tried yet. It was too early to give up, so I had to speak.

“Yeah…?”

In a dazed voice, I hesitated.

How much should I tell him? Since I was the protagonist, should I tell him everything?

Even though I had just shared something with the teacher, he didn’t believe it. So if I told him too much, he probably wouldn’t believe it right away.

Then this was all I had to say.

“…Can you believe me just this once?”

“What do you mean…?”

I didn’t plan to ask him to believe me unconditionally, so I opened my mouth cautiously.

“Two weeks later… on the day of the third exam, you can’t be here. This place will also face monsters, but the village near that wall is in danger. There are no academy teachers or students there.”

That was the same thing I told the homeroom teacher earlier.

Upon hearing that, Yoon Hamin furrowed his brows. His expression seemed to question what he had just heard.

Information coming from the future was like this.

Moreover, it was of a type that couldn’t be tested lightly like a lottery number.

Believing my words meant he would not just say he believes me upon hearing them, but truly believe that monsters would appear and would have to go protect the village near the wall.

And for that, he would have to leave the academy on the day of the third exam.

It was asking him to give up the exam for a bit.

“…Wait, what does that mean?”

“Literally.”

If he asked me where I got that information from, I wouldn’t have an answer. However, I didn’t want to misplace the first step.

When it was time to explain, I could do it then, so for this time, I wanted him to believe me.

Hamin’s confused expression. His eyes wandered around before finally landing on me. I sent him an unwavering gaze as if to say I was speaking the truth, and his expression subtly hardened.

He was going to stop me from committing s*icide but then suddenly I was saying this nonsense, and I decided not to pin my hopes on him.

That was the first thing I learned when I came here. No, to be precise, it was something I had learned through experience.

How to endure just a little more even when ignored or scorned. How not to expect anything and not to be disappointed.

How to endure a little even when feeling lonely.

It was quite difficult for a social animal like a human to learn that, but somehow I was lucky to find a way to endure.

So it was okay if he didn't believe me. Even if Yoon Hamin didn't come, I would find a way to do what I needed to do.

It was fine to be powerless or incompetent. If I knew something in advance, even a small clue would seem significant to me.

As I was renewing my resolve, Yoon Hamin finally opened his tightly shut mouth.

"…How do you know this? Are you, perhaps, a spy?"

He was immediately asking to confirm the authenticity of the information. It was a natural reaction, so I replied softly.

"No, I'm not asking you to believe me blindly, but that's not the case."

I wasn't an ordinary student, but I couldn't go that far in explaining.

Honestly, telling someone the information about the future was one of the dumbest things I could do, but if it could be of help, I wouldn't mind using the protagonist's power to get through this.

It was like clinging to a straw. I felt like I couldn't manage by myself.

"……."

Yoon Hamin lowered his head. He looked conflicted about whether to take this seriously or not.

Should I let go of this straw? Or should I grab it?

“…Can you give me time to think?”

“…Of course.”

Since I hadn’t completely let go of it, could I afford to hope just a little?

No, it probably wasn’t going to happen.

Don’t get your hopes up. The moment you expect something, the disappointment gets even bigger.

Ch. 7 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 7

If I knew the future, the basic policy would be to solve it somehow with that information alone.

But if I suddenly went to that person and said, “In the future, this will happen. So prepare for it,” how much would they believe me? They would have to give up too much and brace themselves for too many things just to accept that.

Even if such an event were to actually happen two weeks later, I had no idea what would become of me afterward.

I could be questioned about the source of the information, regarding how I knew about this.

However, I took that risk and shared the information.

For someone like me, who couldn’t know whether this was right or wrong unless I could retry it multiple times, it was too big of a gamble. Thus, I felt a little scared.

In a situation where I wondered if I could stop one thing or not, I worried that I might not be here after that incident occurred.

But, it was already underway. I had a full two weeks at my disposal. So, I renewed my resolve.

The same school life every day. A space where mockery and disdain exchanged glances.

Although it wasn’t mine, I wriggled under the atmosphere that eventually approached me.

It was so unpleasant that I wanted to shake it off, but I didn’t even have the capacity to do that, so I just endured and let it pass.

A day went by, and the sunset fell. While everyone returned to their homes, I did not go back.

It felt like two weeks was too little when I thought about being alone.

“…Are you an academy student?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Then just hop on.”

“Thank you.”

Everyone dreamed of wearing this uniform. It’s understandable since wearing a uniform grants some benefits.

But I still couldn’t understand why I had to endure disdainful, contemptuous, and mocking glances just to obtain such a uniform. I hadn’t done anything while wearing this uniform either.

Kanna was just one character who was gradually fading away. That’s probably why I felt so powerless.

I got into a fast-moving taxi and absorbed the quickly changing scenery.

The central view that had been right in front of me suddenly got closer to the wall set up for those fleeing.

With all sides except the center being walls, it was hard to tell which side was which. Still, there were things I had to look for.

First, the monster that would summon the creature.

Second, the ominous totem created by that creature.

Third, the crack that appeared on the wall.

To enter the space where the barrier was set up, one of those three was definitely necessary. While it might be hard for others to detect any abnormality, I believed I could find that clue a little better.

I walked while looking around.

It was an ordinary city. There were apartments, and houses lined up densely.

It was a bit fascinating how the scenery changed drastically, compressing the wealthy and poor neighborhoods together, possibly indicating the wealth gap.

“…Where should I start looking?”

In fact, I couldn’t easily gauge where to begin.

In the early stages, the true nature of events typically doesn’t become clear; hence, I couldn’t tell how or where to pick up on any signs at the academy or in this city.

All I could do was flail around to find traces.

It was daunting to handle everything alone, but fortunately, I had two weeks at my disposal, so I thought I could do my best.

Even if I couldn’t stop this time, there would be a next time. Of course, I had no intention of settling.

With that resolve, I carefully surveyed my surroundings. The gazes that were converging around me.

Maybe it was because the white uniform indicated I was a student at the academy, but I noticed the eyes around me slightly focused on me.

Those looks seemed like admiration or envy, and I barely managed to hold back the corners of my lips from drooping.

They would think of me as a star. They would think I was able to enter the academy because I had abilities.

I wanted to tell them that entering such a place with insufficient abilities would be hell. However, since they didn't know that and hadn't asked for help, there was no reason to say such things.

I looked at the wall. The massive wall seemed like it wouldn't let anyone in. But thinking that someday it might break down and that a monster would rush in to take many friends, lovers, and family away seemed to make me shiver in fear.

While I was lost in thought, I realized that the gazes weren't only focused on me, and I glanced back. There stood Yoon Hamin, a student in the same uniform, hiding in an alley and watching me.

"…Yoon Hamin?"

Why did he follow me here? It didn't seem likely that Yoon Hamin lived nearby.

"Ah…"

He, who had been tailing me, scratched his head awkwardly and slowly walked out.

"…Did you follow me?"

"Uh."

His response was a cheerful one to my quiet question. Although he didn't seem to care about me at all, it appeared the words he spoke on the school rooftop today had left quite an impact.

I had thought he would ponder over it, but I didn't expect him to follow right behind me.

I knew he was proactive, but I had no idea he could go this far.

“Why?”

“…You asked me to believe you, but to trust that, I’d have to mess up my test. So I thought I needed some reasonable, let’s say, credible evidence to believe you.”

Yoon Hamin answered with a bitter smile.

He had been informed about the future but couldn’t provide any evidence for it. I couldn’t say, “I saw you in a work of fiction. I’m someone from outside that work.”

Thus, what I provided was a piece of information about the future given without any justification. Deciding that just believing that one piece of information and relinquishing what he had been targeting was nonsense.

But it was impressive that he didn’t stop there and followed me, trying to gather that evidence.

Was it something we could call humanity worthy of being called a hero?

“Besides, would you like to talk more comfortably? We’re in the same class and… friends, right?”

Hearing that made me almost let out a laugh.

Friends? Talking about being friends. I don’t have anyone like that at the academy. Someone with friends wouldn’t bother buying bread at the school store and hiding in the last stall of the bathroom, would they?

But even if I expressed my emotions, I wouldn’t gain anything; I would only lose more. So, I suppressed my feelings as much as possible.

I brought forth that heart, which had allowed me to endure the isolation and the disdain, scorn, and laughter.

“Is that so? Then, I’ll speak more casually.”

With an indifferent tone, I turned my steps again. Yoon Hamin quickly responded, “Oh, okay,” and hurriedly followed behind me.

When he looked around, it felt a bit frantic, but when the gazes around us seemed to diminish slightly, he spoke to me.

“Do you live around here? Or is there really something happening here? For real?”

It was a cautious voice.

Since he had been carefully watching me as I walked, perhaps that was why he seemed to be taking things seriously.

Although I had asked him to believe me just once without a solid basis, I was genuinely moved that he would go this far for me.

“I don’t live here… There’s not really anything here, but I came to see if there’s something around here. That’s all I know.”

This was the truth concerning the current incident. I knew about the next incident as well, but I couldn’t bring it up.

Knowing too much might provoke some resistance, so I decided to just speak of what had already been done and monitor the situation from there.

A village that was near the wall. Because of that, a family from another class would disappear.

Just the fact it was from another class left readers with a vague impression of “What’s that?” Meanwhile, the tragic backstory of Kanna was barely getting mentioned.

I had to cut out irrelevant details surrounding the protagonist Yoon Hamin and the relevant ones right from the start. I firmly believed that was the way to somehow unravel this tragedy.

“…Kanna.”

“Uh?”

“What kind of thoughts do you have while living?”

“…Huh?”

At his sudden sarcastic question, I frowned and turned around. Yet, when I saw his expression, I realized he wasn’t being sarcastic.

“…Is this why you couldn’t focus in class?”

“…….”

I kept my mouth tightly shut and fell silent.

Did that silence serve as enough of an answer for him? He exhaled a sigh of defeat and looked at the wall.

I was terrified, feeling as though this wall, which seemed unbreakable, might crumble. And that I had said a monster would rush in here, in merely two weeks’ time.

Yoon Hamin seemed to be contemplating whether to believe my outrageous words.

My grades and performance weren’t good either. At this moment, even the teacher might perceive what I said as a desperate attempt to postpone a test.

In truth, even if that was how they viewed it, my situation wouldn’t change at all, so I didn’t mind.

The notion that things couldn’t get worse than the muck I was in was excellent news for me.

“…Then what should I look for?”

Yoon Hamin asked me, as if deciding to trust me once.

Looking at him wide-eyed, he averted his gaze.

“No, you said two weeks. So, if you find something in that time, wouldn’t there be no reason not to believe?”

“…Is that so?”

Since he followed me this far, maybe he had indeed decided to believe me this once.

Hearing Yoon Hamin’s words made me wish for something to come out right now.

I wanted to experience the feeling of someone believing in me, even just a little.

Was it a bad habit of mine to harbor hopes at the slightest hint of a possibility?

Still, wanting to indulge a bit, I turned my steps back toward the path I had been going.

“Then I’ll tell you what to look for.”

In a low voice, I mentioned what he should look for. It might be better for him to find something more than I could, and searching together might seem more promising than alone, so I spoke as if asking for assistance.

Ch. 8 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 8

“…What a waste.”

As the sun set and it neared the time to head home and sleep, Yoon Hamin was the first to speak up, perhaps suggesting it was time to wrap things up.

Honestly, I thought about whether to see more, but since it was still the first day and I couldn’t keep holding onto this village, I nodded.

There were no cracks in the wall, no totems, and I couldn’t find any monsters.

It truly was a waste, and I felt a bit guilty. I wondered if I would be branded a liar.

However, Yoon Hamin seemed completely unconcerned.

I looked at him for a moment before turning away. Even though it was time to go back, I couldn’t hold onto that mood.

“Yeah, it’s nothing, but thanks for helping out.”

At those words, Yoon Hamin tilted his head.

“If what you said is true, it means someone here could d*e.”

“…That’s right.”

“We can’t just stand by knowing it’s about saving lives.”

He spoke with righteousness.

I knew he was righteous, but I knew him even better. I couldn’t not know.

I felt a deep admiration for someone who pursued ideals while being pragmatic.

Even though I still couldn’t fully believe what I said, I felt grateful for his willingness to help find evidence together.

I never expected to gain help from the protagonist’s character.

Honestly, since the day he suggested we become friends, we hadn’t even shared a meal together, so I wondered if I’d end up never giving him much attention since he showed no interest in the narrative, but that seemed to be an unfounded worry.

“Are you coming out again tomorrow?”

“Probably.”

“…Huh.”

He replied immediately, and he chuckled at the reply.

“…Right. Do you live in Central City?”

“Yeah.”

“Then let’s go back together. I’ll see you off.”

“…No, it’s fine. I’ll go back alone.”

I declined the offer,

“Alright. Be careful going home.”

Yoon Hamin smiled faintly as he waved goodbye and slowly walked away.

I quietly watched his figure. I had to go that way anyway, but I didn’t particularly want to walk back together.

It would feel burdensome to stick close to someone who wasn’t even a friend, and I had no confidence in accepting his gaze entirely.

I knew how hard it was to ask someone to just trust me without any proof. Even if I followed him while looking for evidence, there was no guarantee anything would come of it, which would be frustrating.

Even if it were real, if someone asked me how I knew that and how I was so sure, I would have nothing to say.

What would I do for two weeks, and what could I do after that?

If I clearly had knowledge about the future, I thought I could completely change the narrative, but all I felt was sadness at my own powerlessness.

No one believed in me or expected anything from me, and it made me feel this lonely, causing me to laugh hollowly.

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Friday had arrived.

Even though it was Friday, the students weren’t in a joyful mood.

It was understandable, as the academy’s exams were always on Wednesdays. So it wasn’t a system where you could take an exam on Friday and play over the weekend.

The weekend was merely a time to review the lessons from Thursday and Friday in preparation for the exam on the following Wednesday.

But what could be done?

When it came to protecting the world, weekdays and weekends couldn’t be distinguished, so I had no choice but to get accustomed to it from now on.

In the midst of it all, I found it particularly difficult to concentrate on class today.

Perhaps sensing that, Orca, who was sitting next to me, glanced at me.

“…You seem to be troubled today.”

Her softly spoken words struck a bit painfully, revealing that my inability to focus in class was indeed obvious.

“It’s nothing.”

It might be because there were so many thoughts on my mind.

I brushed it off as nothing, but the situations from yesterday kept flashing in my mind.

The girl with ivory-colored hair and purple eyes.

Yesterday, walking with Kanna Aurora wouldn’t leave my head.

I followed her because I wanted to know why she asked me to believe her just once on the rooftop, and in the end, I was left wondering if what she said was nonsense or truth.

She suddenly claimed a monster would attack the academy and other villages, which seemed outrageous, yet her serious expression made me wonder if there was something to it.

So I followed her, and it became clear that this wasn’t just a ridiculous story.

The three items she told me to find seemed like the words of someone predicting that this wall had broken or would break.

What was Kanna thinking?

My consciousness kept drifting towards Kanna.

Normally, I wouldn’t want to pay attention to someone who couldn’t focus on class and was lost in other thoughts, but after hearing her voice yesterday, I couldn’t help but be concerned.

I couldn’t stop being drawn to her.

What basis did she have to claim that monsters would swarm here in two weeks?

It was difficult to dismiss it as a joke from someone who just didn’t want to take the exam because I had seen her genuinely searching for clues.

If she were second in class or if she were in the ranking to take down the top student, I might think it was some tactic, but that didn’t seem to be the case.

“…Yoon Hamin?”

Orca’s gentle voice brought me back once again.

“Ah, sorry. I got lost in thought.”

I smiled wryly.

Honestly, since I thought all I had to do was defeat the monsters and threats against the world, I never expected these kinds of worries to crop up.

“Is that so? You really need to concentrate on class. If not, you’ll fall behind?”

Orca squinted her eyes and smiled playfully.

She was second in class, but I could see determination in her eyes as if she might catch up to me.

While the difference in the theory wasn’t significant, the disparity in practical skills could turn the situation upside down if I made just one mistake in a written exam.

“Yeah.”

I picked up my pen again.

But still, even while I was studying, the worries persisted.

I was reminded of Kanna’s voice as she stood at the ledge of the rooftop, murmuring while looking out.

She said something would be revealed if I went to see it once.

I had no idea what she was looking at, but I wanted to know.

Wasn’t I curious?

Coincidentally, the odd voice overlapping with the third exam seemed questionable to others as well, so was it that serious to mention it to me?

Did she say it only to me, or she mention it to someone else too…

Ah.

Thinking back, wasn’t Kanna on the rooftop in the first place because of the homeroom teacher?

I looked up.

Then, as I tried to concentrate on class for a moment, I stood up when the class ended and the bell rang.

“Yoon Hamin? Where are you in such a hurry…”

“I need to ask the homeroom teacher something, so I’ll be back shortly.”

When I said that, Orca nodded as if she understood and returned to her task.

I thought it was nice that she quickly nodded, given that she had a similar personality to mine.

Anyway, moving on from that, I headed straight towards the faculty room and spotted the homeroom teacher returning from a class in another room.

She was a bit shorter than me, but her aura definitely exuded adulthood.

“Teacher Lucia!”

I called her name, and she turned her head sharply.

“…Hamin?”

“Teacher, do you have a moment? I have a question to ask.”

“…Hmm, I don’t have a class next, so yes, that’s fine.”

She nodded readily, and I led her toward the stairs.

Seeing her walking calmly, as if she was accustomed to this path, made my mouth go dry.

I had called the teacher out for this discussion, but I was still at a loss for how to ask.

No, wait. I should say it directly instead of beating around the bush.

As I opened the door and stepped over the threshold, the rooftop view unfolded before me.

Seeing there was no one around, I realized it was an ideal place to talk.

The teacher looked around once before gazing at me gently.

“What do you want to ask?”

“…Did you talk to Kanna Aurora here yesterday?”

“I did.”

The teacher answered readily.

There was no reason for her to hide that she spoke with a student.

But when it came to the content, the story was slightly different.

Calling the teacher aside seemed to be for the purpose of discussing this very topic.

Yesterday, when I climbed onto the rooftop, she had mentioned such things.

So the teacher probably knew about this story too.

“…Teacher. Did Kanna Aurora mention that a monster would come yesterday?”

“…It seems she said the same thing to you. When I went up on the roof yesterday, she said those things.”

“Yeah.”

The teacher seemed to ponder for a moment but then turned her head as if it was no big deal.

What Teacher Lucia was looking at was the expansive view of the village.

It was a vast space, but in its finiteness, humanity was suppressed in freedom.

I looked at the barrier that conveyed that fact.

“It’s better not to worry too much. Kanna might just be pessimistic about her poor grades and want to cancel the exam.”

“……What?”

“This place is inside the barrier. There hasn’t even been a report of cracks, so there’s no way that could happen.”

The teacher cut off my thoughts firmly.

I blankly stayed silent before nodding.

That was true. Our position as heroes relied on gradually expanding the barrier while defeating the monsters we faced to stabilize it.

Moreover, we would receive reports when monsters were about to enter through cracks, making the appearance of monsters seem like an instant event.

The teacher's judgment could be deemed correct.

So I couldn't say anything in response.

"All you need to do is immerse yourself in your studies, Hamin. If you entered as the top student, graduating as the top student will lead you to a very good place. You understand that, right?"

"…I understand."

"Good. Is the conversation over now?"

"…Yes."

"Then I'll be on my way."

With that, our conversation ended, and the teacher opened the door and cautiously left.

"Ah, and Kanna. If you ever go to the rooftop alone, please stop her."

I quietly nodded at those words.

What the teacher said was right. It seemed anyone would agree that her judgment was correct.

However, the reason the teacher was so stern about Kanna's story was

merely to ensure the exam went smoothly. I couldn’t shake off a feeling of unease.

I also didn’t care much about those who didn’t try, thus I didn’t pay much attention to Kanna.

But was it really a matter of not trying? I wondered if I had to ask her to find out, so I carefully looked at the sky that Kanna had seen.

Could it be that something would be revealed if I went to see it just once?

I didn’t know what it was, but I wanted to find out.

Ch. 9 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 9

Friday had always been a good day. Just the thought that I could rest for the next two days after enduring this day gave me some strength.

On days I didn’t have to come to the Academy, I didn’t have to skip meals or worry about being judged by those around me while pretending to study, nor did I have to face ridicule during practical training.

Of course, I didn’t plan to rest idly just because it was a holiday.

If anyone knew when a monster might appear, it would probably just be the monster itself. So, I needed to set my schedule and decide carefully where to check and what to do.

The time between the end of the Academy’s daily schedule and when the sun set and I got home felt far too short.

On weekends, I could go out from the morning, so I thought I might be able to explore more.

As I pondered this while rolling my pen, the day flew by again. When the bell announcing lunchtime rang, everyone went to eat, and I blankly took in their retreating figures.

It seemed this week would end with this.

When Monday’s first lunchtime arrived, I felt overwhelmed about how to get through this week, but as Friday came, I felt like I wanted to reward myself for making it through.

Maybe I should go buy some bread.

As I stood up, a shadow of someone approached closely in front of me.

“Kanna, do you want to eat together today?”

What?

I raised my head at the sudden question, and upon seeing a familiar voice, I found Yoon Hamin standing there.

…What sudden wind blew that he wanted to eat with me? Could it be he had something to ask because of what happened yesterday?

It was a bit sudden, and since it was Yoon Hamin, I couldn’t help but glance around.

If it was fortunate, it was that most of my classmates had gone to eat, leaving only a few eyes watching.

“…Eh.”

I wanted to respond with “Why?” but mistakenly bit my tongue, so my words didn’t come out properly.

There should be some reason to have a conversation with someone inside the Academy.

“…Is that not okay?”

If it’s not okay, then it can’t be helped. It wasn’t like I asked with that feeling; rather, his cautious demeanor left me stunned, and I slightly turned my head.

Just as I thought, Orca was beside him, and I felt a glare from her presence.

Orca and I made eye contact briefly, but she kept quiet, as if she had nothing to add, merely gazing at me intently.

Honestly, I wanted to refuse.

I was already in last place, and the stares from those around were no joke. Although it seemed like they were ignoring me, they would immediately start sneering as if they knew how to pick on me.

Eating with the top and second students? No matter how I looked at it, it didn’t seem like a good picture. Even if I wanted to give the impression that I was trying to learn from them, the world doesn’t always work that way.

But suddenly, a thought crossed my mind, causing my body to stiffen.

If I were to refuse this kind of invitation, there might be glances from the side saying, “Who do you think you are?” and the isolation might get worse.

Stiffened up, I found myself groaning before eventually nodding.

“…Sure, I’m fine.”

“…Why the formal speech? We agreed to speak more comfortably yesterday.”

It’s because of the gazes around us!

More than that, can you please pick up on the vibes here? To be honest, if I were to ask whether there’s something worse than being ostracized here, I wouldn’t know how to answer, but I didn’t want to experience any unknown territory so my heart was racing.

I felt Orca’s gaze narrow.

“Ah, right…”

However, Yoon Hamin’s words weren’t wrong, so I quickly nodded and scratched my head.

It was quite burdensome that just when I was getting used to being isolated, someone suddenly wanted to eat with me.

The Academy cafeteria was enormous. It had a system where students purchased meals from several types of food sets, and it could be considered a sacred place for those with many friends.

I had tried to eat here several times, but there were only benches for groups, and there were no tables for individuals, meaning that someone like me who ate alone would be a nuisance.

In truth, most people ate well enough on their own, but they might have given me glances because they disliked me being in last place.

But today was different.

Yoon Hamin was next to me, and Orca was there too.

As everyone's gaze concentrated in one direction, I felt a wave of nausea when I realized it was not on the top student Yoon Hamin but on me.

I was already feeling like I might lose my mind from the gazes of those around me, and if the number of eyes on me was much greater than those of my classmates, how could I endure that?

I ordered the cheapest C set and groaned as I looked at the food on my tray. French toast, bacon, and strawberry jam.

It was much better than what I usually ate, and given the different eating space, the feeling I got from facing it was a vastly different experience.

As I started my meal, Yoon Hamin, sitting across from me, cautiously asked.

"Are you trying to go to the village today as well, Kanna?"

"…Uh, yeah. I guess I will."

With Orca beside me, and even if this wasn't the case, seeing the many eyes on us, Yoon Hamin confidently stating it marked him as not just any ordinary person.

Did he genuinely believe what I said?

“Then what about tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow… I guess I’ll go.”

I said this while casting a glance towards Orca.

Orca was sitting next to me, appearing intrigued by the conversation.

“…Hmm, I guess you talked about something on the rooftop yesterday?”

At those words, I faltered and couldn’t say anything, but Yoon Hamin replied nonchalantly as if there was nothing to hide.

“Yesterday, for some reason, we had time to talk.”

“Is that so? What’s there to talk about in the village?”

“Oh, that…”

The person who would usually share everything so openly was now looking cautious, as if they were secretly checking my reaction.

Honestly, I wondered why he was trying to have this conversation if he didn’t fully trust himself.

I took a deep breath and accepted Yoon Hamin’s unasked for assistance in continuing the conversation.

“…Monsters might appear, so we should prepare for that…”

“Is that so?”

As I faltered, Orca responded abruptly. She didn’t seem particularly interested in an unclear date.

Living within the walls of a massive barrier, the idea that it could break down uncontrollably was far-fetched.

I nodded.

Words from someone in last place lack credibility. It might even appear like I was just trying to tempt fate since I didn’t have the skills.

This was my position. Without strength or trust, it was a place where no one could fully believe me.

However, it was a relief that Yoon Hamin, the protagonist and top student, wouldn’t brush off my words but rather listen intently, acknowledging them.

Orca mulled over what I said for a moment before cautiously asking Yoon Hamin.

“…Hamin, what do you think upon hearing this story?”

“It might not be a completely ridiculous tale.”

“Evidence?”

“I’m looking for it.”

“……”

I hadn’t said anything yet, but the glare directed at me felt too hot.

I was just starting to look for evidence.

Though I was searching for evidence that didn’t exist yet, Yoon Hamin said he would decide based on what he saw. It was fascinating. Normally, it would be entirely natural for someone like Orca to react like that.

“…Sigh. Yoon Hamin. You had a week to play, but now you need to realize there are exams every week.”

“I know that, but…”

“There’s no evidence.”

Yoon Hamin smiled bitterly at my curt interruption and then fell silent.

“Then it’s just a ridiculous story. Barriers don’t break that easily, and even if they did, monsters wouldn’t invade immediately. Even if they did, it’s not Kanna who should worry about it.”

That was a reasonable assertion, and I buried my head in shame.

At this point, I needed to quickly find evidence by myself and present it honestly in front of Yoon Hamin and Orca.

“…Yes.”

Having no further words, I could only respond quietly.

“Kanna, it’s not easy to raise your rank in a competitive place, but if you study magic and put in the effort, you might just escape last place in the end.”

Orca didn’t stop there and continued to give me generous advice.

In essence, it was saying not to waste time with frivolous stuff and to focus on studying.

“I understand, thank you.”

Of course, she meant it well, so I had no complaints, but since this mattered more to me than studying, I simply responded that I understood, though I couldn’t help but let her words slip past me.

Yoon Hamin survives, but Orca dies at the very end. I really didn’t want to lose sight of what was right in front of me, entangled in the present.

“By the way, we’re friends, but we haven’t exchanged contact information. Do you happen to have a device?”

Yoon Hamin seemed to try to lighten the mood, clapping his hands together and taking out his device in front of me. Though we called it a smartphone for convenience, it was referred to as a device here.

“…I do have one.”

“Then let’s exchange. Orca, how about you?”

“Sounds good. Let’s exchange.”

I nodded, and suddenly I had two contact numbers.

Exchanging numbers and eating together while calling each other friends felt strange, as though I didn’t think of this as a friendship. Would I have thought of them as friends if we had created this atmosphere from the beginning?

I briefly glanced at my device before turning my head away.

“How about we form a study group later?”

Yoon Hamin said this jokingly with a laugh, and Orca shrugged her shoulders.

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The next day, Saturday, I woke up early and hurriedly put on my school uniform. Though it was a holiday, I didn’t have time to relax and urged myself to move.

When I reached the rapid transit taxi stop, I found Yoon Hamin waiting with a bright smile.

“Hello.”

What? Why are you here?

“…Why are you here?”

As I swept my surprised heart, I asked him, and Yoon Hamin lowered the hand he was waving and cheerily replied.

“I heard you were going to do something today, so I came to check.”

“…From the morning?”

“Yeah.”

How should I react to this?

Of course, having Yoon Hamin around would allow for a more thorough inspection, but it was so sudden that I was at a loss for words.

Moreover, last night, I had definitely asked if he wanted help, but fearing that my presence would scratch his top student status, I said it was fine. Yet he had come regardless.

If Yoon Hamin’s grades were affected because of me, it would result in a reprimand from that nice teacher for being careless, and above all, Orca would be furious.

Orca aimed for the top student status. But that was something everybody strived for when they all did their best; she didn’t want someone to fluke their way to the top because someone else couldn’t concentrate.

If she was like that, it would be obvious that I would become someone Yoon Hamin couldn’t be friends with, not even in appearances.

I didn’t want our relationship to deteriorate.

“…Go back.”

I waved my hand at Yoon Hamin.

“Huh? Don’t you need help?”

“No, I don’t.”

I replied sharply and turned away. As I pondered where to explore first, Yoon Hamin followed behind me.

“If there are two of us, it’ll be faster, right?”

I sighed at his words and shot back at him.

“…That sounds ridiculous.”

“But you’re really searching for something, right?”

“…….”

“Where you heard or saw that, if you’re serious, it means you somewhat trust that information, right?”

I couldn’t say anything against his teasing tone. Contrary to my intention of wanting to push him away, the reasons to do so completely vanished.

“Since we’ve been there, shall we turn here?”

“…Ah, wait a moment.”

“I’ll buy lunch today.”

Now that caught my interest.

“Let’s go!”

Yoon Hamin cheered and led me into the rapid transit taxi.

Ch. 10 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 10

The morning was fruitless. When lunchtime came, Yoon Hamin looked around and took me to a snack shop.

I never thought the day would come when I would eat pork cutlet.

As I sliced the pork cutlet and put it in my mouth, the unique flavor of the sauce filled my mouth.

Crisp, crisp. As I was cutting the next piece, Yoon Hamin cautiously asked me, "…By the way, where do you usually eat?"

At the sudden question, I stiffened for a moment. I couldn't express the indescribable emotions swirling inside me.

I didn't really want to tell him where I eat, so my mouth felt dry.

However, as if he didn't really want to know that, he hesitated, stopping his hands. It felt like he was reluctant to say something.

Not knowing what he was trying to say, I watched his face for a while, and the uncomfortable silence was soon broken.

"No, it's not a weird story…" "I just eat at home. Why?"

I answered nonchalantly.

More than that, I was curious why he was asking where I eat.

Yoon Hamin, perhaps not expecting that answer from me, made a groaning face before letting out a sigh.

“It’s nothing.”

The meal continued.

I wasn’t particularly interested in having a deep conversation, so I was satisfied with just having lunch.

After the meal, our exploration continued in the afternoon. Yoon Hamin seemed to look around and, confirming that there was no one around, cautiously spoke to me.

“Hey, Kanna.” “What?” “Would you like to eat together at school from now on?”

Hearing that made me recall earlier when he asked where I usually eat. I realized that his question wasn’t about whether I ate at home or a restaurant, but where I would eat at school.

I felt relieved that I had answered vaguely earlier.

If I had thought about saying I buy bread and milk and eat them in the bathroom, I would not have been able to say that. By the time I thought about it, the atmosphere would have turned cold.

Anyway, what was more important was why Yoon Hamin suddenly wanted to eat with me. Previously, he had just left me alone, so what had changed that led him to show me kindness?

It could be a baseless sense of persecution, but as someone who had been discarded once, it wasn’t something I welcomed.

“Why suddenly?”

My voice became a little curt.

Perhaps sensing my tone, Yoon Hamin looked a bit apprehensive. He then responded in a slightly timid voice.

“…I need time to decide where to go next…”

I sealed my lips at his words.

Though I had been the one to ask him to trust me, once Yoon Hamin started dedicating his time to help me, it also brought its own difficulties.

I wanted everyone to survive, but I didn’t want to be hated either.

However, if it would mean that everyone could just survive, the hatred might be bearable.

If Yoon Hamin found out that my presence was the reason for his declining grades, that gentle Orca would surely be angry. She might even ask why I kept standing in front of the first place.

It would be breaking her desire to legitimately claim the first place.

Still, I didn’t want to d*e, nor did I want to watch anyone d*e. Above all, the emotions you can have only when you are alive.

“Thank you.”

So I spoke honestly.

“…Thank you for believing in me even though you have nothing to trust…”

Why was it? This feeling swelling up made me choke.

Ah, right. It was because until now, I had nothing.

Not a single person had believed in me, and suddenly someone was believing in me without conditions or compensation, which was so joyous.

“…Ugh.”

I felt tears welling up in my throat. Since being dragged here, it was the first time I felt someone's heart, and I couldn't organize the overwhelming emotion, so I quickly turned my head.

"Kanna, are you okay…?"

Yoon Hamin cautiously asked me, but I didn't feel okay at all.

I just sobbed quietly, completely forgetting that I was in a crowded street.

Today was another fruitless day, but I felt too gloomy and filled with other thoughts to dwell on such things. I felt like I had gotten a little closer to Yoon Hamin, which was a welcome change.

In a situation where no one believed in me, I realized how joyful it was to have someone who believed in me, and I returned home, holding my trembling heart.

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Saturday was fruitless, Sunday was fruitless. Thankfully, however, Yoon Hamin continued to help me.

Even though there was no evidence that anything would come out, he believed in me and earnestly listened to what I said.

Is there a crack showing on the wall? Are there any suspicious people or totems?

We repeated this without playing over the weekend and discussed it, and my heart felt calmer than before.

And then came Monday.

Because I had spent the weekend with Yoon Hamin, I once again savored the cold stares aimed at the last place.

There was no expectation, faith, or hope. Just scorn, disdain, and the awareness that I was a person who wouldn't get anywhere.

I walked through those looks like they were a carpet. I knew that walking on such a path with a clear mind was impossible.

When I arrived at the class, there was Yoon Hamin. The protagonist of this world with black hair and golden eyes. The one who had all the spotlights on them.

He greeted me.

“Hello, Kanna.”

At the sound of his voice, everyone focused their eyes on us. I stood there blankly and responded with a bitter smile.

“…Hello.”

Everyone seemed shocked by the natural greeting. It appeared different from the atmosphere when I had previously asked him to be my friend.

He was not a friend just because I asked him to be, but rather the form of a truly natural friend, which seemed to create that atmosphere.

I felt a bit good. The week that was supposed to start off gloomy felt somewhat better.

And rightly so, because the stares I had once found terrifying had changed a little.

As the class started, I was able to concentrate on the lesson. Of course, my weakness lay more in practical exercises than in notes, but since my notes weren’t perfect either, I toyed with my pen to bolster what I could.

I could not keep just receiving from Yoon Hamin forever.

The reason I had the luxury to study like this right now was that Yoon Hamin was helping me.

At lunchtime, he invited me to eat together, and he said he would help me after the academy’s work finished, so I no longer had to figure out how to

survive alone.

And sure enough, as soon as the lunchtime bell rang, Yoon Hamin briefly watched the kids leave, glanced at Orca, and turned his steps toward my side.

“Kanna, they say the cafeteria food is really good today.” “Really?”

When I responded that way, Orca smiled sadly.

“It’s nice to see you getting close. And you seem to be working hard.” “… Ah, yes.”

I replied stiffly.

For some reason, I felt like I was getting scolded by my mom for not studying whenever Orca said something like that. Still, if I could build some rapport with her, that would be great.

“I-I will work hard.”

I thought that there was no further response necessary. I simply hoped this one statement would leave a good impression on her.

Anyway, after nodding at Yoon Hamin’s proposal, the three of us were able to eat together.

I felt somewhat happy at not having to go to the last stall in the bathroom with just bread and milk. And I was also very happy to be able to face the academy’s sumptuous cafeteria food.

I didn’t have to worry about who would hear me and mumble my words quietly.

I pushed delicious food into my mouth today as well.

It was a moment filled with a joyful sensation.

“…By the way, Kanna.” “Yes…?”

As I enjoyed my meal, Orca cautiously gestured, seeming to think it looked a bit unpleasant.

As I was about to voice my question as to why I was being interrupted while eating, I realized that I alone was stuffing my cheeks.

Ah… Thank you, Orca.

I struggled to swallow the food I had crammed into my mouth and gulped down some water. Tears welled up. I gasped, pounding my chest to catch my breath.

Then Yoon Hamin, who was sitting next to Orca, handed me the cup of water he had brought earlier. I nodded once and drank the oasis as if I had found it in the desert and shoved down the food that was stuck in my throat.

“Ah… I’m sorry. Thank you.”

I apologized to Orca for drawing attention and thanked Yoon Hamin for giving me water.

We continued our meal. Unlike before, I tried to eat as gracefully as I could, to the point that the surroundings wouldn’t notice me.

Of course, I could not match the elegance of Orca, who was naturally graceful.

Yoon Hamin took a glance around. He seemed to be looking to see if it was okay to ask about today’s after-school plans. But he glanced at Orca beside him and regretted not being able to do so.

I knew that Orca wouldn’t want to be separated from Yoon Hamin, so I had expected it to be this way. It was a leisurely lunch period, so it would be fine to discuss it then anyway.

I was in a good mood just being able to eat comfortably like this, so I thought it didn’t matter.

“…Yum.”

I stuffed the last remaining piece of meat into my mouth.

It was delicious. I was so happy.

Just having someone beside me made me feel less self-conscious. The feelings I hadn’t experienced since coming to this world wrapped around me, and the corners of my lips naturally curled up.

For this moment, I could forget that I was in the last place and feeling ostracized.

Ch. 11 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 11

About 40% remains.

The village I need to check.

If only I had watched a manga, I could find a place that closely matches the scenery, but since that’s not the case, it seemed to take quite a while.

Still, the fortunate thing is that Yoon Hamin helped me.

Because of that, I was able to pick up some speed.

If Yoon Hamin hadn’t helped, my search for the village would have been a bit flawed, and I wouldn’t have filled this much.

I consider it fortunate that I have passed halfway and look forward to what comes next, but apart from that, today wasn’t a day I felt particularly good.

I was happy that Yoon Hamin helped on Monday and Tuesday, but today is Wednesday.

It was the day of the weekly exam.

I looked in the mirror. On Wednesdays, I feel the worst, and I couldn’t help but have a dark expression.

The ivory hair gave off a gentle impression.

The purple eyes were staring at me from the mirror.

“…Fighting. Just raising my rank by one would be enough…”

I mumbled to myself like that.

I thought about how the only one who can change me, who can change my surroundings, is ultimately me as I adjusted my blazer and stepped outside.

Korean, math, history.

The written exams seemed fairly ordinary.

Just because I’m Korean doesn’t mean I can get everything right in the Korean exam, so I made a few mistakes, and there were problems I missed in math due to a slip-up, but it was still within the expected range.

I was a bit worried about history, but thanks to studying quite hard this time, I could answer to some extent.

Among the content that passed by in the novel, I found some things that I could easily write down, so I wondered if I could look forward to this test score.

The problem was the practical exam.

I had to destroy the training dummy with magic, but it seemed to mock me.

As if asking, “Can someone like you break me?” Could I even make a scratch on it?

Amongst many watching from behind, I was ultimately left alone once again.

“……”

Using my ability is, in fact, simple.

Just draw in magical power and release it as it is. In other words, the magical power passing through the ability user converts into that user’s ability.

For Kanna, that was not easy.

Whether it was that I could only spit out a small amount of magical power at once, or I couldn’t accept it, I couldn’t properly manifest my ability.

I bit my lips.

The electricity extending from my hand was too resentful.

“Ugh, ugh…!”

Everyone else was making gold on the training dummy, even damaging it halfway or completely, but why was I unable to do anything?

Why didn’t this electricity even reach the training dummy?

“Ugh, ah!”

While everyone was watching, it felt like I heard someone giggling from somewhere.

Maybe because of that, I became more desperate. I got stubborn.

crackle, crackle.

I felt the electric current flowing through my hand intensify a bit more.

Could it be that it would reach a little?

But even before that came, my vision blurred.

The training dummy suddenly appeared as two, then three.

Unless the training dummy has the ability for duplication, I must be seeing it wrong, but why?

Why…?

This power hasn’t even reached over there yet, so why.

My body staggered. I felt a tickling sensation on my upper lip, and when I roughly scratched it with my left hand, a damp liquid wet my hand.

“…Nosebleed?”

As I murmured, I heard my homeroom teacher’s voice.

“Kanna! It’s mana o-ring! Stop using your ability!”

At that moment, my vision faded downward.

With a thud, I fell helplessly, and only then could I meet the gazes of those watching from behind.

It felt like the teacher’s voice was coming from far away.

The stares directed at me, the gazes towards me were originally of this kind, I realized anew.

The academy of meritocracy was, unlike the school I knew, vicious and brutal.

What kind of thoughts would they have seeing me, unable to even touch the training dummy, collapsing while being told it’s mana o-ring?

That girl’s already hopeless. She probably wouldn’t be able to properly act as a hero.

So, is there any meaning in getting to know her?

With those thoughts, they would keep their distance from me like before.

They would mock me for not being able to inflict a single scratch on the training dummy despite pouring all my magic power into it.

They might even talk about me in places where I was not present.

I was stubborn for hating that, but instead, it only made me more miserable.

I narrowed my brow. And then I closed my eyes.

*

“…Ugh.”

I groaned as I lifted my body.

Even though my mental state seemed still foggy, it was a relief that it wasn’t as hazy as earlier.

“Are you awake?”

And there was Orca sitting on the chair next to the bed.

Her face, slightly cold, showed neither sympathy nor pity towards me.

Not even the soft smile that would cheer me on.

Her beautifully flowing golden hair and sharp blue eyes were fixed on me.

I answered, feeling small and defeated.

“…Yes.”

I looked around, wondering why Orca was here.

And the answer came surprisingly easily.

“The health teacher asked me to clear this room. Everyone else left because it’s a day of exams, and no one is coming here anyway.”

“Oh, I see… But why, um?”

I nervously asked, thinking maybe there was something to talk about between just the two of us, but Orca glared at me.

It felt like she could k*ll someone at any moment.

“I’ll make it brief. I want you to stay away from Yoon Hamin.”

Orca said that.

I didn’t even need to ask why.

“While Kanna is lying here as a mana o-ring, the practical exam has ended. The body techniques exam and the rescue exam have also finished. But do you know? Yoon Hamin couldn’t answer a few questions in the written exam.”

“…Ah.”

“I know that recently Yoon Hamin has been interested in Kanna, but this won’t bring good results for either you or Yoon Hamin.”

I instantly understood upon hearing those words.

That Orca Lamiris was angry.

“Thank you. Thanks to you, I am the top student this week. But I didn’t want it to be like this. Kanna. It’s great that you’re trying hard, but please don’t ruin someone else with that.”

I felt my lips tremble.

I thought I had enough courage to be hated.

But seeing her try to push me away, thinking of Yoon Hamin, I couldn’t gather that courage at all.

It was impossible for me to say it didn’t matter.

How could I push away someone who criticizes for the sake of someone?

I just bowed my head and answered quietly.

“…I’m sorry.”

Orca wanted to surpass a fully prepared Yoon Hamin.

But it was none other than me who ruined that and pulled Yoon Hamin down to second place.

That was not only a matter that would upset Orca's mood but also something that could evoke resentment from several teachers who were hoping for his top position or from other classmates who saw him as an idol.

Orca knew that I was the cause, and that's why she spoke to me like this, but I was also scared that if other teachers or students knew, they would tell me why the last place is blocking the way of the top student.

Could my situation get any worse?

"…I'll be careful."

"Please do."

Orca said that and then moved her feet.

This is what the society of heroes is like.

Since it's about saving people and protecting the city, there shouldn't be any compromise in terms of skills.

Yet, the appearance of what seemed to be the only top student became something I pulled down.

The proud figure of wanting to walk my own path, even if hated, was nowhere to be found.

Not wanting to be hated more than this and not wanting to be stuck in an even worse situation, I kept my mouth firmly shut.

It was merely a problem caused by the depletion of magic power, so there was nothing left but traces of being dragged to the bottom.

I shook off my body and quietly got up from the bed to leave the health room.

A rather quiet hallway.

Since it’s an exam day, it seemed everyone finished early and went home.

Should I gather my bag and head back?

As I thought about that while heading to the classroom, I saw Yoon Hamin and Orca remaining in the classroom.

“Yoon Hamin, you heard that from the teacher but still…!”

“B-but.”

“That’s not ‘but.’ What you said before…! Ah.”

d*mn, perfect timing.

“No, I just wanted to grab my bag. You two can talk.”

I said that while picking up the bag that was at my seat and heading straight for the door.

And there was Yoon Hamin blocking me.

“Kanna, today…”

“I’ll go alone.”

I said that with a bitter smile and immediately turned my back.

Whenever I see Yoon Hamin, I always feel something incredible.

I must have felt that same sensation while reading the novel, prompting me to keep watching.

So dazzling and shining that no one would hesitate to call him a hero.

Many others had fought while receiving the title of hero, but those were all fake, and he was the only true, undiminished existence.

In the story, I was merely an extra who would pass by, but just the fact that I asked for help and received it without worrying about his grades was so dazzling that it warmed my heart for a moment.

I wanted to lean on him.

But if I did, it was obvious I would lose too much, so I had to take a step back.

I was alone again.

“Ah, Kanna.”

My homeroom teacher must have had something to do in the classroom, as she bumped into me on her way back.

No, seeing Yoon Hamin and Orca remaining, maybe she had something to discuss with them?

Having already taken two exams, it seemed likely since the two were alternating between top and second place.

“Yes?”

“Are you okay?”

“Oh, yes. I’m fine.”

“Be careful next time. If you use your magical power that excessively, your body won’t hold up.”

“I understand. Thank you.”

“Then, take care on your way back.”

The teacher said that and seemed to be going back to whatever she had to do, entering the classroom I had just come out of.

I could hear her talking and conversing with Yoon Hamin and Orca, but it was none of my business.

Too much had already gone wrong.

Kanna Aurora, in other words, my involvement had caused so much to go awry from the start, and the story was flowing down a strange path.

Yoon Hamin had lost first place and was cooperating with me while Orca advised me to distance myself from him.

Orca was indeed very upset, but the reason why she didn’t say anything further was probably because she was kind.

Thinking of her considering Yoon Hamin, I felt that being a heroine isn’t something anyone can do.

Looking at Yoon Hamin, who had believed me even without any evidence and had asked me to trust him, I thought that being the protagonist isn’t something anyone can do either.

Indeed.

“They look good together.”

I felt the feeling of watching a novel again.

The exhilarating sensation of directly facing a story.

It wasn’t the time to smile, but if I didn’t at least smile like this, I felt like I would forget how to smile, so I tried to smile a little.

Ch. 12 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 12

In our class, there was the last place student, Kanna Aurora. If you measure the class average, it’s clear that her presence was causing the grades to drop.

At first, it was due to a slight pity.

Because she was in the last place, she couldn’t get close to anyone, but deep down, she actually wanted friends and spoke to Orca, asking to be friends.

Perhaps it was because she was good at studying, and she had a desire to learn hard.

People can’t always show kindness, but in that situation, her determination to make friends was touching, and that was how it all began.

I became her friend, but since this was my first time trying to create a friendship in such a contrived way, I didn’t know what to do, so I just left it be.

And before long, I realized how much “doing nothing” could leave a horrible memory for the other person.

When I went to eat as usual, I realized that Kanna had asked Orca to be friends because she didn’t have any.

There was no one who played with the last place student. So naturally, there would be no one to eat with her.

Realizing this too late made me feel a bit guilty. However, if I apologized, wouldn’t it be Kanna who would be hurt the most?

So I kept my mouth shut. But not speaking only left more in my heart.

How should I treat her? Should I just treat her normally?

I was conflicted.

I knew that friendship couldn’t be forced and that if one side excessively cared, no one would be happy, which made me hesitate.

I couldn’t treat Kanna as a friend, even though I was the one who said we should become friends.

What did I really want? I was questioning myself.

Just when I was hesitating, I got a chance to talk to Kanna at the end. And the relationship that had begun turned into something I could call friendship in no time.

I followed Kanna around.

After the academy hours ended, and even on the weekend, I stayed by her side, moving here and there.

It felt like I was seeing a different side of her than the one I saw at the academy.

She seemed like a different person compared to the one who always shrank in fear, spent her days silently, and quietly left.

Was it because she had someone to talk to?

I trailed behind Kanna, and during that time, perhaps I was colored by her, thinking that there might be something sweet in her ungrounded belief.

Without any evidence, it could be a naive thought, as Orca suggested, but Kanna was diligently moving around without caring, and I wanted to trust her once.

But the world isn’t always so easy, as something was blocking me.

“Yoon Hamin.”

The teacher with light brown hair tied up was scolding me.

I didn’t care that I wasn’t able to keep my position as the top student, but the reason was that I lost points in an absurd way.

While practical evaluations cannot lead to a tie, written tests can, so losing points here was significant. As a result, I became the second, but that was my unavoidable responsibility.

“…Yes.”

“What were you doing to end up with such poor grades while not studying properly?”

“There were circumstances.”

The teacher dismissed Kanna’s words as ridiculous. I kept quiet because I thought that telling this would only make Kanna suffer more.

“You said it yourself. If your scores get damaged like this, you won’t be able to be part of the national ranking. Didn’t you tell me that when you came to me for advice at the beginning of the semester?”

“I’m sorry.”

I lowered my head deeply.

Having asked the teacher for advice and then failing to uphold the teacher’s guidance felt shameful.

“Orca.”

“Yes.”

“Orca, your grades are still clean, so you might have a bit more possibility than others. If the top two keep switching places, that just means there are

two talented individuals, right?”

“…Yes.”

Orca replied slightly dejected. It was probably because I got reprimanded first.

“Then I wish for you to not make such mistakes in the future.”

After saying that, the teacher’s gaze returned to me.

“It’s still the first semester of the first year, so it’s not too late to judge. Your chances may have decreased, but they haven’t completely disappeared, Yoon Hamin. I hope you don’t give up and keep getting grades like before. It seems unlikely you will fall out based on your practical performance.”

“Yes.”

After being scolded once, I finished my greetings with the teacher and left the classroom.

In fact, I was supposed to investigate that barrier with Kanna today, and I felt regret for not being able to do so.

She would probably think her scores dropped because of her and want to distance herself to protect me.

If she wanted to pull away, I thought I might have to let her go so she wouldn’t get hurt. But that answer was still unclear and I couldn’t find it.

Kanna had been unable to make friends because of her poor grades, but I knew that if someone approached her, she’d show many different sides.

Perhaps she had never had the chance to eat freely; when she did eat something, she enjoyed it like a hamster. And when she realized that I believed in her, she shed tears and choked on her sobs.

How could I shun someone who was filled with joy just at the fact that someone believed in her when no one ever did?

“Yoon Hamin.”

While I was debating on whether to go home, Orca, who was leaving school with me, called my name.

When I turned to look, the beautiful girl had a frown on her lovely face.

“…Why?”

“I think you’re trying to hide something, but I hope you’ve distanced yourself from Kanna.”

“I really want to ask why.”

“You must be going around confirming what I said last time. I mean, you walk home with Kanna every day. Don’t you think I wouldn’t notice? I’m right next to you; there’s no way I wouldn’t know.”

Hearing that made me smile bitterly. I honestly replied since I wasn’t trying to deceive her.

“Like I said earlier, I still want to believe in her at least once.”

“Just once?”

“Yeah.”

Honestly, how could I not believe someone who cried because they felt trusted? That feeling was proof that she wasn’t lying.

I knew why Orca was reacting that way.

But that was that, and this was this, so I couldn’t heed her words.

“Really. I understand. But it’s best to stop doing anything that might affect your future.”

Eventually, perhaps yielding to my stubbornness, Orca sighed and said that.

She was concerned about the future that awaited us after spending three years at the academy, and instead of feeling annoyed, I felt grateful. It’s rare to find someone who speaks good words like this.

“Got it.”

I was starting to take a bit of interest in Kanna Aurora. What was I looking to see? That voice still lingered, leaving me curious.

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Thursday was the day immediately after the exam, and it was the day that announced the preparation for a new test, so everyone hated it.

Having had four exams in a week, it was also a day that brought more misery knowing we had to return to the academy the next day.

Still, I was thankful to be able to get through the day.

Though I hadn’t adapted to the scrutiny around me, I had learned to endure. Moreover, having someone to eat lunch with helped me to endure a little more.

After classes ended, the clock pointed to 5 PM. As I was thinking it would be nice to step out, swing by a nearby convenience store, grab some food, and explore places I hadn’t been yet, Yoon Hamin approached me.

“Kanna, do you want to go home together today?”

I had refused his offer to return together yesterday.

The reason was clear.

The damage I was inflicting on Yoon Hamin wasn’t much within the range he could bear, but I wanted to minimize it while reaping maximum benefit for myself, and that meant I had to carry too many burdens.

I feared being hated by Orca and being targeted by the teacher.

And I feared even more that I would have to go through an academy life that would be a nightmare compared to how I was living now. I was afraid that everyone would point fingers at me and call me a crazy freak, and I realized once again that I didn’t have the courage to be hated.

“No, it’s okay.”

I forced a smile.

I could feel the eyes of those who were preparing to leave school, including Orca, looking at me. Everyone was wary since Yoon Hamin had just dropped to second place after mingling with me.

Amid such gazes, I quietly pushed him away.

“You don’t have to help anymore.”

“No, I still haven’t—”

“Really, it’s okay.”

I rejected his kindness. I had no choice.

“…Really?”

“Yeah.”

No matter how much Yoon Hamin persisted, it was natural for him to back down when I refused this much. I pushed him away, and he hung his head, looking dumbfounded.

“No, suddenly…?”

Muttering that, I softly said to him.

“You know, there’s nothing good about being around me.”

I am alone. I was alone, and I was used to being alone.

In truth, it’s hard to get accustomed to loneliness. If everyone around didn’t feel loneliness, that feeling of isolation only multiplied.

But there was nothing I could do. I felt really thankful for the help he’s given me so far, that is why I smiled.

“I’m sorry for lowering your grades.”

As I said this, I quietly secured Orca’s feelings, while also instilling fear in others that being with me could cause them to lower their grades.

Yoon Hamin looked at me with wide-open eyes.

“…That’s not your fault…”

“I’m sorry.”

I cut him off as if to hammer my point, and then I left.

I felt like the emotions I had wanted to hide were trying to spill out, so I clenched my mouth shut.

If someone saw me, they would probably think I looked really strange. My lips were contorted in an uncontrolled manner.

I quickly exited the academy and headed towards the village I hadn’t been to yet, passing through a nearby stop.

To calm my gloomy heart, I tilted my head up towards the sky and sniffled.

“Hah.”

I deeply realized that a relationship I didn’t desire couldn’t even be considered friendship.

As I soothed myself, thinking I had been too greedy, something caught my eye. An unpleasant feeling sent chills down my spine and left me frozen in place.

“That’s…”

Ch. 13 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 13

Just a while ago, I was feeling gloomy at the thought of sorting out my relationship with Yoon Hamin, the kind protagonist I had only just made a friend.

But now, I was even questioning if I had such emotions at all.

Thump, thump.

The rapid beating of my heart was neither from excitement nor sadness.

Was it more like the fear of a prey confronted by its natural enemy? Or perhaps a warning feeling that my life was threatened even by that existence.

Since humans don’t have something like a siren, it could be said that the heart serves that purpose, and it was something I could vaguely understand.

“…Oh.”

What came into my sight was neither the crack in the wall nor the presence of a monster, but I instinctively knew what it was.

“…Totem.”

The moment I uttered the word, I quickly covered my mouth and scanned my surroundings. Thankfully, there didn’t seem to be anyone passing by at this moment, but the real problem was how to deal with that.

I pondered how to remove that ominous feather, which was located just high on the barrier, barely within reach of a human hand.

It would be different if I had a ladder, but I doubted I could find one around here quickly.

Moreover, if I were to ask people around, they were all ordinary citizens.

The minimum requirement to enter the academy was that one, like me, had to be able to accept magical power and have even a slight manifestation of ability. Therefore, I couldn’t ask for help from the people here who were not attending the academy.

If I had known it would be like this, I should have asked Yoon Hamin nicely when he offered to help.

But even so, at that moment, I thought it was best to refuse. That’s how this vicious cycle came about.

It seemed that no one had noticed the existence of that totem yet. Ordinary people found it hard to detect the flow of magic in such places, so they wouldn’t even feel the ominous sensation, and it was a secluded area where Awakened Ones rarely passed by.

I thought I could reach it by standing on my tiptoes.

I was doubtful if it was safe to touch it with my bare hands. In the story, totems were mostly shattered with magic or tools, so I couldn’t help but feel a bit anxious about touching it with my bare hands.

Surely it was too dangerous to handle it that way.

“Wait a second.”

I looked around again. After confirming that there was no one else, I swallowed hard.

The reason I couldn’t shatter the training dummy was that my strength, simply put, couldn’t cover that distance before the dummy was solid.

Why was the distance a problem? Because it was a test.

And right now, this wasn't a test of any sort. The rules hadn't been set, and there was no need to stand on equal ground with someone else.

I knew somewhat about the sensation of accepting magical power. I was aware of the feeling of that mana ring from yesterday.

It felt like I was gasping for air after running like crazy, my head spinning.

"What does it matter…"

I muttered as I reached my hand upward. Toward the feather radiating ominous energy.

If I were to fail here, it would feel as though I had been wrong from the very beginning.

Crack.

The sensation of accepting the flowing magical power enveloped my entire body. Even though there was already enough within me, my body urged more as if it were lacking.

A flash of yellow light burst at my fingertips, revealing a shape. Even if I couldn't reach the training dummy, I could probably break this purplish feather.

Creak, crackle.

The totem in the shape of a feather began to respond to the sudden external impact. It looked like it was resisting with some consciousness.

No, it was too weak.

I was growing anxious. Even though I felt the dwindling magical power in my body so intensely, this feather only trembled slightly.

"Ugh…!"

Closer, stronger.

I grabbed the totem without knowing what kind of side effects would come.

The output of my ability was focused solely on my palm, and I gathered all the magical power I possessed and released it to the fullest. Flames were bursting from my clenched hands as if putting on a firework show.

I frowned.

I could feel my body shaking.

But unlike before, I didn’t feel like my magical power was running out. Only the sensation of it being chipped away was enveloping my body.

As I was keeping my trembling fist clenched and passing time, the dreadful power emanating from the feather finally dissipated.

“Haah…”

A feeble groan escaped my lips. As I reluctantly opened my hand, the feather was crumbling helplessly on my trembling palm.

It turned black, colored in ash, and dispersed into the air. Just like it originally had.

It felt like cold sweat was flowing all over my body. My vision was blurry, and I wanted to rest a little. So, I leaned my body against the barrier and took a breath.

I was so weak that I could tell my own breath was faint.

My palm was blistering red. It didn’t matter while releasing, but it was only natural for an explosion to cause such a result upon contact with my body.

“It hurts…”

But still, I was relieved.

Even though my palm was stinging to the point of tears, at least I was able to prevent the monster from attacking here.

I was reminded once again of how threatening the existence of those who could handle such totems or monsters could be.

Next Wednesday. The village here should be safe that day.

In truth, it was the lives of people I didn't even know and family, but still, I thought that saving their lives might be worth a palm like this.

I lowered my head heavily.

Yet, my worries didn't go away. Just blocking the monster's attack was undoubtedly a good thing, but it felt so one-off, and I had no idea how to anticipate what would happen next.

Anyway, considering the actions I had already taken while living as Kanna Aurora, I had strayed far from the narrative, needing to quickly change the things that hadn't been altered yet, where causality still hadn't reached.

Otherwise, the information I had known would turn into scraps of paper, leaving nothing that I could rely upon.

I comforted myself. If I hadn't done this, I would have become a mere puppet, waiting for d*ath without changing anything from the beginning.

*

Friday should be a day to look forward to since the next day is the weekend, but for the academy students, it was not.

Since there was an exam on Wednesday, they had to review the studies from Thursday and Friday and repeatedly train for the practical exam, making it hard to be happy.

Of course, not everyone would be studying at that time; some might go shopping at a department store, others might go to the zoo to see animals. But most invested that time into studying.

I wasn’t sure if I would see results even if I invested that time, so I simply shrugged. In fact, I was thinking about studying, but I didn’t want to spend the entire weekend like that.

Under normal circumstances, I would have investigated the barrier, but since I resolved things blandly last night, I had some degree of leeway.

Of course, it might not be just that, so I had to look around once in a while, but at least I had a sense of direction from having discovered it, whether it existed or not, so I could take a breath.

“Kanna?”

“…Oh, hi.”

I could see Yoon Hamin’s face slightly stiffen as he came to greet me in the morning. It was because the right hand I raised in greeting was wrapped tightly in a bandage.

“What happened? Was there something yesterday…?”

“Oh, this.”

Classes were about to start, so the kids quickly gathered to chat. And, as always, their gaze naturally fell on Yoon Hamin, then shifted to me, the one he was speaking to.

I swallowed hard and responded with a bitter smile.

“I got burned while cooking.”

I knew it was peculiar that Yoon Hamin believed my words from the start.

He was just and kind, which was why he believed what I said, while others would be skeptical until they saw for themselves, and even if they did, they’d surely ask where I got that information from.

I didn’t want to announce it around. But I wanted to tell Yoon Hamin.

I thought he would believe me.

“…Be careful.”

“Yeah, I’ll be cautious from now on.”

I decided to let it pass for now and talk about it separately at a later time. No, I could just send him a text later through the device.

“Hello, Kanna.”

“Oh, hello.”

Orca appeared from behind Yoon Hamin, likely having met on the way. She greeted me, and I returned her greeting in kind.

To others, it probably seemed like a bizarre sight.

The top student and the second student were bickering while the last place student was conversing during morning greetings.

However, exchanging greetings in the morning and having lunch together was about all there was to it.

If I took away his time again like before and as a result, it caused trouble for Yoon Hamin, then even if he said it was fine, others around would be upset for him, and I wouldn’t be able to endure that.

After finishing the greeting, I casually took out the textbook from the desk drawer and laid it open as if nothing had happened. Then I carefully took out the device from the blazer’s inner pocket and pressed the screen.

Press, press.

[I discovered a totem yesterday.]

I typed the message but couldn’t bring myself to send it and bit my lip. Soon after, I turned off the screen without sending that text.

It felt too conspicuous to send it right after the greeting.

If I had known it would be like this, I should have contacted him in advance while receiving treatment yesterday. I often forget that I can reach out to someone since I hadn’t used the device for so long.

Swallowing my bitterness, I exhaled a breath mixed with relief as I started my day.

Ch. 14 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 14

After the academy's routine ended, I watched the students who were leaving their seats for a moment before moving my bag, which I had hung next to my desk, onto the desk.

Now that the weekend had begun, I planned to review all the textbooks from Thursday and Friday's classes to somehow fill in my notes.

As I packed my books, Yoon Hamin, who hadn't said much during lunch, quietly approached me, looking a bit concerned.

"Kanna, are you…"

"No, it's fine."

It seemed like I would be wandering around the village again today. I should have told him in advance.

Thinking that, I suppressed a sigh. Communicating the facts over my smartphone was one thing, but I felt a bit regretful for not having any evidence to show.

Caught up in the thought that I needed to dispel my anxiety as quickly as possible, I reached out without thinking.

Even though I knew when it would burst, I still had the thought of "What if?"

The anxiety stemmed from the fact that I had deviated from the path the original owner of this body should have walked and altered the course of

the protagonist’s journey.

I knew the end of this story, but whether it had changed or not was uncertain. However, one thing I could say for sure was that from now on, there would be no future I knew.

Of course, the dark schemes and methods of the villain wouldn’t change. But by doing this on my own accord, the academy was not attacked, and at the same time, the village was not put in danger.

I couldn’t say it was perfect since I needed to check if anything was left, but once I found one, others would likely follow.

“I’ll contact you separately.”

I replied like that and took my leave.

“Uh, okay.”

Yoon Hamin nodded as if he understood my words. Should I be thankful that he understood?

The gaze of those around us became a bit subtle, as if they were pondering the implications of me saying I would contact him separately. However, there wasn’t anything in this situation that they could grasp. We merely exchanged farewells.

“Then see you next week.”

*

Although I said that, the sharp gazes of the people around me implied I had said it because I really needed help. I wanted to bring proper evidence to those who believed in me, making them feel glad they trusted me. If that was the case, I needed to hope for more evidence.

Of course, it would be best if there was nothing more.

[I: I discovered a totem yesterday.]

I stood at the bus stop and sent a message through my device.

The message sent to Yoon Hamin quickly received a response.

[Yoon Hamin: So, did you hurt your hand this morning because of that totem?]

The fact that I was contacting someone felt quite bizarre, and I thought it was unlike him to be concerned about my injured hand from this morning.

[I: By the way, if you're not with anyone, could you help me?]

[Yoon Hamin: Where are you?]

[I: At the bus stop.]

After sending that, my device fell silent after receiving a message that he would arrive soon.

Honestly, I thought he would be with Orca, but perhaps he didn't always stick around her.

"…You came quickly?"

Seeing him arrive at this place so fast made me sweat a little. I hadn't expected to feel how incredibly fast his footsteps were, staying within the top student position.

No matter how he walked, it would naturally be faster than my dazed pace.

"You should come quickly. But you say there was a totem… Really? Where?"

His pupils seemed to tremble. It seemed he was startled by the fact that there was a being capable of threatening this barrier.

I hadn't even shown him the totem yet. I hadn't proven that it existed again. Yet, he was half-believing and looking at my hand.

“…Can you show me your hand just once?”

I flinched. Then, I cautiously extended my hand.

As I presented the hand wrapped in bandages, he carefully touched the finished part.

With a light pop sound, the pressure on my hand relaxed. It was a bit more comfortable, but in the end, I couldn’t help but furrow my brow.

Removing the bandage from the wound was a bit stinging.

Seeing that, Yoon Hamin frowned slightly.

“…Oh my. Is that a burn? How did that happen?”

“Well, the totem looked like a feather, and I was trying to eliminate it. I was pouring all my abilities into my hand…”

“Well, you should have known this would happen. Why didn’t you call me?”

He looked at me with a gaze full of concern, as if he wanted to scold me. I winced and ended up giving a bitter smile.

“I thought I had to remove it quickly… I guess I didn’t think of anything else.”

“…Are you okay?”

As I lifted my head, which had been bowed slightly due to his words, I looked at him. His eyes widened as he gazed at me, prompting him to ask again.

“…Still, are you okay?”

“What do you mean?”

As I expressed my confusion, he hesitated before opening his mouth.

“I’m asking if you wouldn’t be believed by anyone. Would that be okay?”

Well.

“Really? Should we start moving?”

I said nonchalantly and quickened my pace towards a different scenery.

We arrived once more at the village where I had discovered the totem yesterday. I approached the barrier and blankly looked around.

“…This is it. This is where the totem was.”

I said that and quietly opened my mouth about the totem.

“It was in the shape of a purple feather, and since it was in such a desolate area, the other heroes didn’t know its true nature.”

Yoon Hamin listened to my words for a moment, then groaned.

“As I said earlier, no one will believe you like that.”

“……”

I already knew. Without any evidence, who would believe me?

“So I came back to find evidence. Who knows, there might be something else?”

As I said that, I touched the barrier and looked at the surface of the wall.

Honestly, I hoped there wouldn’t be anything else. I thought it would be great if it was just this one.

If there were two, I might think there might be three. If there were three, there might be four, and if there were four, there could be five, and I would have to proceed with that constant anxiety.

Yet, still.

Wanting to make the trust I had barely gained—no, almost received for free—my own, I found myself unconsciously seeking what should not exist. I regretted hastily erasing all possible evidence and lamented about yesterday's events.

With heavy steps, I moved forward. Yoon Hamin silently followed behind me.

"…Kanna."

"Yes?"

"Is it true that the monster will invade next Wednesday?"

Yoon Hamin asked, as if tracing back to what I had said. The answer I would give was quite obvious.

"…It's true, but if there are no more totems, then it probably won't happen."

What I said now was merely a boast that a madman would make.

Who would want to join me in this orchestra that I was playing all alone?

Despite saying the monster would come, if I suddenly uttered that I had erased the totem all by myself, thus increasing the chance that it wouldn't come, who would respond with 'Ah, I see.' and just let it slide?

I felt deeply sorry for Yoon Hamin, who had believed in me. That the price of belief could vanish into a hollow lie.

In the end, nothing would happen, and peaceful days would continue.

If that were the case, why was I so desperate, why did I have to wander so much, and why did I have to get hurt so badly? It seemed clear that the answers would remain as mere questions.

"I'm sorry."

That was all I could say.

“I’m not someone you can trust, am I?”

I laughed playfully and kept walking.

I wasn’t someone like Yoon Hamin, so I couldn’t understand what was so urgent about it that led me to extend my hand with a feeling of ‘I need to hurry.’

Only someone capable like Yoon Hamin, who had gained enough trust around him, could act like that.

I, who was incompetent and had no trust, would have no one to believe in me, and I would only be spouting nonsensical stories.

“No.”

And then there was a voice that cast away my self-pity. Stopping in my tracks, I turned to face Yoon Hamin, who had been following me.

“What?”

“…If you tell me why you’re being serious, I will continue to believe you.”

For a moment, I felt like my thoughts had stopped.

“What do you mean by asking me to tell you what’s serious?”

“Right now, the fact that you’re continuously searching like this. I haven’t seen any evidence. When I came, you were just about to look for it. You’re searching, thinking it might be somewhere again. But really, is there a reason to go that far?”

Yoon Hamin slightly moved his arms, demanding an explanation. His arm, which moved from the inside to the outside, seemed to urge for an answer from me.

Yeah, the reason why I was doing this.

“…You’re not seriously doing this just because you dislike the exam, are you?”

“Yes.”

Yoon Hamin first cleared the first anxious thought.

“…You’re not saying that no one would believe you, so that’s how you’re speaking, right?”

“Yes.”

Although it was a somewhat rude statement, I answered calmly, as I understood perfectly in this situation.

I wasn’t mad enough to go to such lengths without any evidence just to ask someone to believe me.

Twice he questioned, twice I answered. I firmly denied everything, letting him know that I was okay, that I wasn’t causing a ruckus because I wasn’t believed, and that I wasn’t pulling tricks to avoid the exam.

As a result, he couldn’t find a third question and stared at me with a pained look, narrowing his brows.

“Then, why…?”

“……”

I fell silent.

Not knowing where to start or where to end made this tricky.

The current teacher was dead, the master I would gain by becoming a hero was dead, my friends in the class, and the Orca I loved were all dead. Everything you cherished would crumble and scatter, leaving you with nothing in your hands.

Even if I told him that everything you built around you would be lost, for him it would merely be a curse.

All of it was a curse aimed at him.

And the most painful thing was that even during all this, he had to say he would survive.

It was something that should never happen to a hero like Yoon Hamin.

He would have to scream that he should d*e if anyone were to d*e, that if he lived, it couldn’t be just himself who survived. That was how he would have to shout, though, of course, that would never happen.

What could I possibly say?

I couldn’t share anything about the future.

All it would do was raise resistance, so I could only keep my lips sealed.

Yeah, I just needed to tell him why I was doing this.

After a brief moment of hesitation, I smiled lightly, trying to hide the bitterness, and answered his question.

“Because I want you to smile.”

Knowing full well that it was a completely unexpected answer, I said it anyway.

The reason I came to this world and worked so hard was not only to avoid d*ath, but also to ultimately protect the people around me and ensure that a smile never leaves your face.

After all, Yoon Hamin was my hero. He was someone who could be called a hero even beyond the written word—upright, kind, and capable.

It felt as if he was letting me know that no matter how difficult things were, there is always a way out. Even when exhausted and troubled, it was simply

so wonderful to eventually rise and vanquish the enemy that I cheered him on.

I could even empathize with him.

I simply thought that the protagonist, who had risen against adversity, needed a smile. It couldn’t be possible for someone who worked so hard to lose everything and be left in despair.

At the very end, I wanted to wipe away the tears shed from losing everything. I wanted to tell him that all of this was just a nightmare.

Upon hearing my answer, Yoon Hamin opened his eyes wide and stared at me. Suddenly, taken aback by such a strange response, he fell silent for quite a while.

Ch. 15 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 15

Yoon Hamin was blankly staring after hearing my words. After mulling over what he heard, he quietly asked again. It felt like it wasn’t enough to satisfy him.

“…You want me to think it’s funny?”

It wasn’t an incomprehensible reaction. In fact, I thought it was a natural response.

If it weren’t for me, he wouldn’t have had any reason to be distressed, so I could understand how this situation might be awkward for him.

It seemed odd for someone like me, who only placed last in the Academy, to be worried about the top student, and it made one wonder why I was pretending to be close when we weren’t that intimate.

Yoon Hamin didn’t know me, but I knew him.

Given the circumstances, that might have been expected. Thus, there was no way to bridge the gap between us.

I knew many things, but there were just as many things I couldn’t say.

“Yeah.”

I answered calmly. My lips twitched. Emotions kept surging inside me.

The last sentence kept coming to mind, making my brow furrow.

Yoon Hamin was gazing at me in a daze.

“…Why?”

Hearing that, I smiled bitterly. It was a smile to stifle the tears that felt like they would burst forth at any moment.

Was it because my heart was too soft? Because I empathized too well, I often shed tears even at sad sentences. The tears flowed easily, dampening the screen, saying they were just for him.

How could it be less than that with the protagonist right in front of me?

“We’re friends.”

I returned Yoon Hamin’s words to him. If it were for this reason, he wouldn’t have found the words to respond.

Thinking like that, I turned my head.

“…I see.”

It seemed strange, yet he couldn’t find the words to say anything, maintaining silence after hesitating.

As I quietly looked at him, I shifted my gaze to where the horizon swallowed the sunset.

Yoon Hamin had lost everyone he tried to protect. He had lost comrades who shared his shoulder and lovers who patted his back.

His last moments, where he fought bravely and tried to keep the peace even at the cost of his own life, were those of a hero, yet he couldn’t live up to what it meant to be a hero.

Alone, he had pitifully survived, creating a path with his tears.

It felt like I could see his back as if I had witnessed it.

“Thank you for believing in me.”

I walked with my back turned to him, expressing the emotions I had just acquired.

There was no response, but I continued speaking to myself. Honestly, I just wanted to voice my thoughts somewhere. I wished someone would listen.

“Even though it sounds ridiculous, the fact that you helped me look for evidence, and that you came here after receiving my message, I truly appreciate it.”

My pace didn’t slow. Afraid he might see my distorted expression, I just walked along the barrier.

Then, this time there was a voice following me.

“…But I want to ask something.”

“Yeah?”

I secretly moistened my dry lips with my tongue. After all, I was the one walking ahead, so he wouldn’t see it.

Yoon Hamin paused for a moment before throwing out his question.

“Can I ask how this relates to me smiling?”

“Ah…”

In that instant, a mechanical response of “Yeah, I guess” almost slipped out, but I held it back and let out a small sigh.

Words didn’t come to mind because the future was too distant. In fact, it felt like my happiness might have been stripped away all along, leaving me to question whether what I was doing was right.

But he’s a hero.

Hero Yoon Hamin.

If he engaged in actions worthy of a hero, wouldn’t his lips curl upwards?

Before losing everything around him, protecting it, taking care of the surrounding areas before they vanished, and by doing so, maintaining Yoon Hamin’s happiness seemed like a possibility that led to this endeavor.

I had no clear answer. Nothing was certain.

Just like how Yoon Hamin’s happiness had abruptly been taken away, I was scared this world would suddenly rob him of his smile too.

All I could feel was fear that everyone would d*e, and that inside this barrier, a bl**d storm would begin.

I chose my words carefully.

This was about saving someone I didn’t know at all. It could also simply be described as rescuing a student’s family, somewhere in the Academy.

So even if I did this, it was hard to imagine Yoon Hamin being happy.

I could only wonder if he would feel relieved or if he would even stand up again.

Thus, a proper answer did not exist.

Even so, I threw my response out there.

“Look, if I keep doing this, you can continue to smile.”

I responded like that, glancing back at him. Then I raised my bandaged right hand slightly, pointing toward the barrier.

“What…?”

I walked on without saying the rest.

Yoon Hamin still seemed puzzled, but he didn’t turn his steps away, declaring that he thought I was crazy or that he couldn’t trust me anymore.

The horizon swallowed the sunset, and after the sparkling starlight spread across the beautiful night sky, I finally stopped walking.

“Is that all there is?”

As I murmured, Yoon Hamin hesitated for a moment before looking at me.

“Kanna. You worked hard.”

“…You too.”

“But really, if what you desire is…”

He struggled to voice something but then frowned and swallowed the words he might have said.

I tilted my head in confusion, but he shook his head, as if dismissing it with a small laugh, and turned his steps back.

“It’s nothing, let’s go.”

He said that and headed toward the station. I quietly followed behind him.

*

I couldn’t go to Kanna because she repeatedly insisted that I shouldn’t come during the weekend.

If I found anything, I promised I would really send evidence this time, but since I hadn’t received any messages with photos yet, it seemed she hadn’t found anything.

Honestly, if you asked if I really believed, my answer would be ambiguous. Since I hadn’t seen anything yet, it felt absurd and utterly far-fetched to trust just based on hearsay.

However, for some reason, my intuition was sharpening.

Watching Kanna desperately searching for something, I thought that if it were an act, it would be quite impressive.

Moreover, her words that she hoped I would smile kept swirling in my head, making me narrow my brows as I didn’t feel like going back again.

She hoped I would smile?

Had I really not smiled all this time?

No. I certainly wouldn’t have smiled when focused on studying.

I definitely wouldn’t have smiled while immersed in training.

But when I usually hung out with Orca or other classmates, it seemed I laughed quite a bit.

I touched my mouth with my hand. I wondered if my lips were turning downward, so I fumbled but couldn’t find anything else.

“…What are you so worried about?”

Orca, who was sitting next to me, asked. The blonde, aristocratic daughter, Orca Lamiris, looked at me with a concerned expression.

I quietly looked at her and groaned.

“Nothing… I’ve just been studying lately…”

“Hehe, then this week should really be a proper competition.”

She, who had a strong desire to win, seemed determined to compete and beat me fair and square.

I had lost the first exam, and during the second exam, I couldn’t study because I was following Kanna, which left me feeling unsatisfied. So it was natural for me to feel that this time would be different.

“That’s right.”

I replied like that, but all the while, images of ivory hair and violet eyes lingered in my mind.

The sad eyes that faced me that day, seeming to be dyed red in the evening glow while smiling.

—Because I want you to smile.

To be honest, we weren’t even that close. I didn’t really have any special bonds with anyone at the Academy.

After all, it was still the beginning of the semester, just moving into the fourth week.

Only friends whom I had been getting along with.

Yet for some reason, Kanna’s gaze toward me felt a little different.

“…Hmm.”

I twirled the pen I was holding. Using the ability of stars to attract each other, I made the pen spin more flamboyantly without dropping it from my hand.

As my worries deepened and my thoughts multiplied, it spun faster and more glamorously.

While I was idly sitting during class, Orca poked me gently.

“…Yoon Hamin.”

“Oh, sorry.”

Maybe it was because it was Monday.

I sighed deeply, recalling useless thoughts.

As the warm afternoon sunlight streamed in, I tried to concentrate again.

And so, a peaceful day passed.

Kanna went to check on the barrier again today, but I couldn’t follow her this time.

I thought I couldn’t disappoint our teacher, so I decided to focus on my studies.

Tuesday was similar, and soon Wednesday arrived.

It was the Wednesday Kanna had mentioned.

Kanna came in with a haggard face, right before the exam began.

“…Ah.”

I couldn’t even say hello. She glanced at me once before immediately returning to her seat weakly.

With a thud, she dropped into her chair, dark circles under her eyes.

I was worried, but since the exam was about to start, I couldn’t go ask her everything.

I didn’t recall her saying she was going to stay up late yesterday; I wondered if she had freely wandered around all night.

I thought there should be a limit to things like that.

Then the exam began and quickly ended.

The written exam was in the morning, and the practical exam took place throughout the morning and afternoon.

When all the exams were finally over, it was earlier than usual.

The incident Kanna mentioned didn’t happen.

I didn’t know if I should feel relieved or if I should harbor other emotions.

With a restless feeling, I cautiously turned to Kanna, and there she was, quietly looking at her report card.

“Does that mean if I do well, I’ll lose…?”

Orca seemed to glance at my report as she looked at hers, but I set that aside and went over to Kanna.

“Kanna.”

“…Yeah.”

Today, Kanna had suffered ridicule from others during the practical exam again.

Her ability hadn’t even touched the training dummy, and when it came to the body techniques, she had done poorly in falls and attacks, ensuring her place as the last.

The unfortunate environment she faced was certainly not one someone like her would thrive in after graduation.

She would be reassigned to a more remote place.

With someone like her around, it wouldn’t even be safe to roam freely.

Amidst much ridicule and mockery, Kanna appeared as if she might crumble at any moment.

What was that about wanting her to smile.

Isn’t it you who can’t smile right now?

Honestly, I was not entirely sure if I could believe it.

I had never seen any evidence, and as the teacher or Orca said, nothing had been proven to be true.

But if you, who wants me to smile, would at least smile a little with these words.

If her hand didn't truly erase the totem but rather bore the marks of self-harm out of sadness, I wished her to refrain from such acts next time.

"…Today, you've won."

An incomprehensible statement to anyone else.

Hearing that, Kanna opened her weary eyes wide and looked at me.

At the same time, her report card crumpled in her hand.

It surely announced her last place, but it held no meaning for her right now.

If Kanna had indeed protected today's peace, then so be it.

So, I spoke to her to encourage her to smile.

And the response that came back was a quivering voice.

"…Yeah."

Thus, Kanna smiled.

Ch. 16 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 16

The third exam day was Wednesday.

I endured. There was no invasion from monsters. I felt a deep sense of relief about that fact.

Perhaps it was only because of that totem that the barrier was broken, and a village collapsed.

Thinking that way made me feel fortunate that I got rid of the totem even at the cost of my hand.

Well, investigating the barrier is one thing, but I was exhausted from going back to study to see if I could at least escape being in last place.

Of course, when I received my report card, I didn’t feel too great.

My written scores had slightly improved, but since I hadn’t received any points in practicals, it seemed I hadn’t managed to escape last place.

What should I do in the practicals if I want to escape from last place?

While pondering what I needed to do in the practicals as I looked at the report card, Yoon Hamin approached with heavy steps.

“Kanna.”

“…Yeah.”

I wondered what he came to say.

It couldn’t be to look at my report card.

Is he perhaps going to say that nothing happened on Wednesday after all, and that he can’t trust me?

Or maybe he came to ask if this happened because I erased the totem.

I looked up at Yoon Hamin standing in front of me.

Then he spoke softly.

“…Today, you won.”

At that moment, something surged up in my throat.

To be honest, I expected him to express some doubt.

Whether he spoke negatively or positively, I thought I couldn’t feel any better than just doubt since I hadn’t shown him any evidence…

But Yoon Hamin simply told me that I won.

I was unable to handle the whirlwind of emotions that surged within me, so I tightly shut my trembling lips.

I counted numbers in my head and finally gathered my composure to respond.

“…Yeah.”

I didn’t expect him to say that, and I felt as if I had been struck unexpectedly.

“…Um, Yoon Hamin?”

Orca called out to Yoon Hamin.

He turned his head, and Orca looked like she wanted to say something.

I hesitated for a moment, then grabbed my report card, tucked it into my skirt pocket, and slung my bag over my shoulder.

“Then I’ll be going. Orca, please be careful on your way back.”

“Ah, wait a minute…”

To be honest, I thought it was best to give him space at a time like this, so I hurried my steps, ignoring Yoon Hamin’s protest.

I didn’t plan to change everything from start to finish just to change Yoon Hamin’s future.

I just hoped that it wouldn’t be a future where he would cry.

A world where everything around remained intact, where the things he loved survived, and where he could live and smile was enough for me.

Surely that’s not too much to ask.

I stepped out of the classroom, walked down the hallway, and down the stairs, exiting the building.

I’m not sure if it was because any day when an exam ends ends earlier than usual, but the warm sunlight shone upon me.

I swallowed a sigh at the thought that it was already close to April.

I had just crossed the first hurdle, but I was already worried about how the next challenge would approach.

I should wish for as few mistakes as possible.

*

Walls were originally built to disconnect space from space.

With walls, the inside and outside are defined, and names can be attached simultaneously.

So, for the remaining humanity, this barrier was undoubtedly precious.

It was a space for their homes and a space to enjoy peace and tranquility.

“…This is strange.”

Beyond the barrier, there was a village where people live, but the opposite side was completely overgrown with bushes.

I was sure I had marked this place beyond with feathers containing magical power, but now I felt nothing.

I rested my hand on it and repeatedly pondered, but I had never erased it myself.

It wasn’t a matter of memory.

I had sent a few bothersome monsters to the academy where heroes gather in large numbers, and I had planned to send the remaining monsters to the nearby village to trample and consume it, but that plan could no longer work.

A barrier seems like an ordinary architectural structure, but it is anything but ordinary.

Of course, the flow of magical power inside and outside the barrier is different, and it plays a role in blocking that flow.

It was a different kind of magic from that which ordinary people absorb, refine, and use as their own abilities.

Of course, monsters consume the magical power outside the barrier just as ordinary humans consume the magical power inside.

Anyway, it required prior preparation to invade such a place, but that preparation had disappeared, raising questions in my mind.

“…It isn’t anywhere?”

I felt along the wall in vain.

Tsk, I couldn’t help but click my tongue.

After confirming a few days ago that there were no heroes and deeming the village unworthy, I tried to destroy it, but the moment I attempted to carry it out, it had vanished, leaving me astonished.

“This is strange.”

I had managed to keep human rebellion from stirring too much, but I didn’t expect to find this.

Moreover, if I hadn’t been conscious of looking for it, I would have found it difficult to locate, so how did it happen?

Even though they were called heroes, they were merely a ‘profession’ being compensated.

Their sense of duty was just a facade, and I doubted anyone was really committed. So how could this be?

No, I couldn’t be sure that any sense of duty would lead one to act under these circumstances.

The corners of my lips involuntarily rose.

No matter what crazy b*stard was inside the barrier, it was clear that someone had decided to take a gamble.

“Heh, hehe, hahahaha!”

I laughed loudly.

I laughed so hard that anyone watching would be startled and want to distance themselves from me.

I felt like I would truly go insane if I didn’t laugh like that.

To soothe my loneliness, to calm this solitude, I needed someone’s scream.

And I wanted to know who the d*mn b*stard preventing that was.

“Yeah, yeah. This time, I’m defeated.”

It was ridiculous, but for now, there was nothing I could do since my preparations had been shattered.

Right now, I had no means to breach the barrier.

Of course, I might find some means if I looked for another, but I didn’t prefer relying on others.

“But next time, I…”

I clenched my fist tightly.

Grrr.

A sound akin to a thrum climbed up from my throat.

The monster I had tamed showed its teeth, signaling its hunger, but it was unfortunate.

“Oh dear, my baby, are you hungry?”

Grrr.

“Sorry, but it seems there’s some meddlesome b*stard this time. The chance to eat to your fill has evaporated…?”

As I whispered that, the monster understood, sealing its teeth.

So I was simply creating an object of hatred for that monster.

“There’s someone inside who keeps making you starve.”

Hate it.

You starving.

Me being lonely.

All because of that b*stard.

If I could just know what face that son of a b*tch had, I vowed to play with it until it twisted.

“Don’t you hate it? Don’t you want to k*ll it? Then let’s grow bigger.”

Grrr.

Seeing the obedient monster brought a smile to my face.

Of course, just because it understood me didn’t mean it had the intelligence to engage in conversation; it was a being that didn’t do anything but let out growls, so it didn’t ease my boredom.

I looked up at the barrier.

The largest architectural structure in human history.

It was inevitable that irritation would well up after failing to break it, but knowing who the opponent I wanted to tear apart was made me happy.

When the time comes to leave a scar on the next barrier, I hope I can just guess who it might be.

*

“…d*mn it.”

I opened my bleary eyes and groped for the device by my head.

The time displayed on the screen was 1 AM.

I closed my eyes and stretched out my arms, lying flat with the device screen turned off.

I hadn’t gotten any sleep since I stayed up all night finishing investigating the barrier and studying for the exam, which had completely wrecked my biological rhythms.

My head throbbed.

As soon as the academy’s day ended, I had rushed home and closed my eyes, but I ended up falling asleep and waking up at 1 AM, making it quite awkward.

While I felt somewhat refreshed, the lingering headache due to staying up all night made me feel like it would be a headache if I had to go to the academy just like this tomorrow.

“…Ugh.”

Will I be able to sleep again if I close my eyes?

Though my alarm is always set for 7 AM, I’m genuinely unsure because I feel anxious.

As I groaned and caught my breath, I felt a sense that there had indeed been a notification when I checked the time earlier.

Did I misread it, or if not, what was it that had come? I lifted my left arm, which held the device.

When I turned on the screen, several messages from Yoon Hamin appeared.

[Yoon Hamin: Hey, I’m sorry about earlier. There was really no need to rush out like that.]

[Yoon Hamin: Are you upset? Or are you just tired?]

[Yoon Hamin: Are you sleeping?]

[Yoon Hamin: Sleep well, see you tomorrow.]

The increasing interval between the messages indicated that he seemed to have been particularly concerned while I was asleep.

Seeing him send messages even when it wasn’t necessary made me feel a strange emotion.

If the original story was like this, I thought it might suddenly head down a bad ending somewhere without warning.

I acted with the intention of changing it from the start, but I didn’t want Yoon Hamin to feel this worried about me, so I felt somewhat awkward.

Anyway, I thought it would be bothersome to reply at this hour, so I turned off the screen and threw the device beside my pillow.

I pulled the blanket up to my chest again, looking at the dark ceiling of the room, then slowly closed my eyes.

While there were many inconveniences since becoming this body, when I think about my life being over, it feels like it’s just the last one.

“…Haah.”

I let out a small sigh and took a breath.

I wasn’t sure if I could sleep again, but I was going to try my best.

Morning broke, and I woke up to the morning call, dressed in my school uniform, and headed to the academy.

Having taken the exam, it was now time for a week of study once again.

I felt like I might lose my mind at the increasing test scope.

When entering the academy, I was always an object of indifference.

Everyone avoided me for being in last place and didn’t even give me attention.

How could someone like me ever play the part of a proper hero?

To them, I was nothing but someone useless after graduation in terms of connections.

However, there was someone who smiled and greeted me, almost mocking them.

“Hello, did you sleep well yesterday?”

“…Yeah, I slept well. Hello.”

I answered with a slight smile.

Orca, who was beside me, also quietly greeted me.

“Hello, Kanna.”

“Oh, hello.”

As I awkwardly smiled in response, Orca nodded her head.

I felt like a light shone upon my academy life, which seemed like it would always be lonely.

I had felt it since Yoon Hamin first talked to me and had lunch with me, but now that I felt at ease, it felt even deeper.

Yes, it seemed to be because of what Yoon Hamin said yesterday.

For him to say it was my victory meant he believed in me.

It made me feel like he was drawing closer to me.

Even just yesterday, I had thought that the word “friend” was nothing more than empty words, but now it felt different.

“I didn’t reply because the time was too late.”

“You looked tired. Were you out late?”

“…No, I stayed up to study a little.”

This natural conversation now felt genuinely friend-like.

Orca, who heard my words, was gazing at me closely and smiling next to Yoon Hamin.

Though approaching Yoon Hamin seemed like something I disliked, he didn’t mind if I took up his time or interfered with his future, and as long as I did my part, it felt a bit more comfortable having her smile.

“My written score went up a bit, but the practicals are still a bit of a problem.”

“By the way, when will your hand heal? You’re always wrapped in bandages.”

“Oh, this? It seems to be taking a while because of the burn.”

I started my day with an awkward smile.

Ch. 17 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 17

The Lamiris family was one of the families managing the barrier. While several families oversaw the barrier, it could be said that Lamiris held significant influence among them.

In any case, what the Lamiris family upheld was fairness and hard work.

They emphasized that no matter how talented one is, if one is indulgent, they will eventually be overtaken by someone who possesses talent and works hard, becoming a fool that no one will pity.

Of course, a true genius could afford to be indulgent and arrogant. But if one becomes complacent and stops moving forward, they would become no different from a training dummy that cannot do anything, and they repeatedly made this clear.

The reason for being so invested in education and dedicating life to studying was not anything special. It was because the Lamiris family needed to protect the barrier.

The lives of the people inside the barrier were at stake, relying on the Lamiris family and several others.

So, if for even a moment, or even for a single generation, someone lazy and indulgent failed to make an effort to uphold the barrier, the remaining humanity would perish.

Thus, those who do not strive are foolish and ignorant, while those who do strive should always be supported, as they will shine at some point; this was

the education imparted.

Perhaps that was why Orca Lamiris was concerned about Kanna Aurora, who was at the bottom tier even among the lower tier.

Why does she not make an effort even though her grades are poor? she wondered. In fact, if she had simply stopped there, she would have dismissed Kanna as just that type of person. However, Kanna was always busy putting in some effort, as if she were riding a line.

At first, when she mentioned that a monster was coming, Orca wanted to laugh it off.

Of course, with the name of Lamiris, she couldn’t act rashly, but considering that the barrier managed by her family was said to be breaking, she was close to wanting to say something.

Despite spouting empty nonsense without evidence, she was debating whether or not to study, leaving Orca curious about what exactly she wanted to do.

It wasn’t like she was from a family ousted from managing the barriers, nor was she particularly involved in them, so why was she spreading such words?

No, in fact, she hadn’t spread them at all. She had only mentioned it to a few people from whom she might seek help, so it wasn’t an attempt to tarnish her reputation or cause public unease.

Pretending to be sick wouldn’t work anyway, so she wasn’t trying to instill anxiety about something happening during the exam. It just seemed sad to see her believe so strongly and focus her mind elsewhere.

Orca even began to wonder if Kanna was unwell.

However, after a short time of observing Kanna talking with Yoon Hamin, a strange feeling welled up in her.

“I didn’t reply because it got too late.”

“You look tired; have you been out late?”

In fact, if Kanna had answered with ‘Yeah,’ Orca would have scoffed, thinking she was wasting time without a care for the exam. Instead, Kanna smiled and replied to Yoon Hamin.

“…No, I just stayed up studying.”

…What?

She’s putting in some effort.

She was so focused that dark circles hung under her eyes. Realizing that this wasn’t an attempt to escape the exam made Orca gulp.

She wasn’t trying to excuse herself by saying she was busy saving this city and hadn’t studied for the exam. Orca became curious about Kanna Aurora, what she was seeing, and what had inspired such comments.

If it wasn’t just a futile effort to escape the exam, did she have some deeper reason or motivation behind it?

What if, rather than any other reason, it was just that she disliked returning home due to her family environment? What if she wanted to study but couldn’t?

Many questions arose.

So, Orca called out to Kanna.

“…Kanna.”

The stairs leading to the rooftop, where few people came if it wasn’t lunchtime. Ivory hair, violet eyes.

Honestly, if you set aside her abilities, she had a pretty face.

Of course, in the academy, there were many handsome and beautiful people, so one focused more on talent or the family background, which meant nothing in this place.

For Kanna Aurora, who had neither ability nor family background.

“Ah, yes.”

Kanna responded, looking tense, but Orca hadn’t called her to harm her, so she opened her mouth carefully.

“I called you because I wanted to talk casually about what we discussed before.”

“…Yes.”

“Do you know that I am the daughter of the Lamiris family that manages the barrier?”

“Yes.”

Kanna answered without a moment’s hesitation. Although this was information one wouldn’t know unless they were looking for it, hearing her affirm it felt peculiar to Orca.

No, that wasn’t what Orca intended to talk about.

“…At first, I thought you were just trying to get close to Yoon Hamin. Additionally, since Yoon Hamin’s grades dropped while hanging out with you, I felt a bit sorry for not thinking favorably of you, Kanna.”

“…Huh?”

When Orca openly expressed her thoughts that had been weighing on her, Kanna stared at her with wide eyes, as if she never expected such words.

No matter how proud and unwilling to lose Orca was, she never overlooked making an apology when she was wrong. Hence, Kanna’s reaction stirred a

bit of discomfort in her.

“I’m sorry. I just thought you were getting close to build connections.”

“…Ah, no! I was just—”

“If you have anything difficult to say, feel free to share. I can help with studying or training as long as it doesn’t interfere with my life.”

Kanna seemed stunned for a moment, then began to look around awkwardly, moving her head from side to side.

“W-well…”

Since she had said what she could, it was now time to ask what she wanted to know.

“By the way, about what you said earlier. Is it true? As you mentioned, there wasn’t an invasion by the monster. Yet, your hand is injured. Was that self-inflicted…?”

“No, this is…”

Kanna glanced at her bandaged hand, flustered, and eventually sealed her lips in silence.

“…W-well, it is true that my ability caused this…”

Hearing that made Orca’s heart sink.

If only she hadn’t studied for the exam, she could have phrased it as, “I spent my time protecting the peace inside this barrier, and this is a wound I sustained in the process.”

However, since Kanna had studied for the exam, Orca wondered how such an injury had occurred.

Could it be that she was really just looking for an excuse to avoid going home? The thought crossed her mind, and simultaneously, Kanna’s

suggestion to become friends and her separate communication with Yoon Hamin felt like an SOS signal.

Regretting that she had responded coldly, thinking Kanna was merely trying to ruin Yoon Hamin’s grades, she felt remorseful.

Somehow, despite hearing nothing but absurd stories, Yoon Hamin wanted to find evidence with her, expressing a desire to believe. Why hadn’t she noticed that small detail?

“…Kanna.”

A pinch of sadness filled her heart.

Having held a slight affection for Yoon Hamin, she had failed to perceive her surroundings objectively. With a bittersweet feeling, she looked down at Kanna, who was blankly standing below.

“Though I’m not from the Lamiris family, if you ever need help in the future, please come to me. Don’t bear those wounds alone.”

“Ah, y-yes… thank you.”

Kanna nodded, her expression reflecting disbelief.

That was understandable. Normally, Orca had been rather cold toward her. She had only thought Kanna was showing interest in Yoon Hamin and was probably trying to ruin his grades to cause him trouble after graduation.

“I’m sorry.”

“Oh, it’s nothing. It’s really not a big deal…”

Kanna waved her hand, and realizing that the conversation might not continue, she cautiously began to leave.

Fair play and never stopping effort were family values. That was undoubtedly a path to development, and more achievements would accumulate under the name of Lamiris.

Yet, being so blinded by that, she had failed to notice a classmate signaling for help. It dawned on her that without realizing such things, she would merely be part of a barrier management family, not a hero.

She was certainly carrying a deep wound in her heart for having burned her hand using her ability. Orca felt a desire to somewhat mend it as someone who could be a hero.

*

Embracing a dull feeling, I walked down the hallway with my head tilted. I moved my steps away from Orca.

Even though I knew her personality well, I hadn't imagined she would care about a last-placed student like me, so I felt entirely uncomfortable.

"…Um, er…"

Was she simply curious about why my hand had become like this?

When asked why, I almost replied that I had "accidentally erased a totem," but I quickly closed my mouth. Ultimately, I had no choice but to confirm that it was indeed caused by my ability.

How could I explain what a totem was to them? In front of people who had yet to encounter a totem, merely mentioning a totem would draw unnecessary suspicion.

It wasn't the time to reveal it yet.

I was already somewhat anxious about revealing it to Yoon Hamin, and there was no way I could tell Orca, so I nodded while holding onto my frustration.

In the end, Orca's expression seemed a little sad.

Leaving behind nothing but thoughts of what it could be, I hurried my steps toward the classroom.

I thought she would at least tell me to distance myself from Yoon Hamin, but instead, she honestly apologized and expressed her thoughts, which made me think highly of her.

Of course, even if she didn’t say to keep distance, since I would maintain my space anyway, I wanted to tell her not to worry about it. Although saying that could be too much.

“By the way, I hope I’m not being seen oddly…?”

Ch. 18 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 18

It was Friday.

The day to start April had already arrived.

The burn on my palm was gradually healing, but since it wasn’t fully recovered, I left the bandage on as a precaution. I thought it would be just right if I loosened it just enough to hold the pen more comfortably.

Thinking that I would be safe for the time being, I spun the pen in order to somehow tackle the approaching exam. From the fourth exam onward, magic students would also be included, making it a troublesome week.

I wondered why I hadn’t started preparing from the beginning, but since it was already added, there was no point in complaining.

Anyway, I was devoted to studying with the single-minded thought that I couldn’t remain at the bottom forever.

I was aware that just staying in last place wouldn’t change anything. I held on to the mindset that if I could raise my rank even a little, I could strengthen the influence of my words and guide everyone to help fend off the threats that might come next.

That was my intention.

“Kanna?”

“…Oh, yes?”

I suddenly turned my head in surprise. It was Orca, who usually didn't engage in conversation, speaking to me.

She had called me into the hallway unexpectedly just yesterday, so I felt a bit nervous about what she might want today.

In fact, when she called me yesterday, I had internally shouted, "I studied! I studied!" but once I realized that wasn't the reason, I could somewhat accept being called out like this.

"Is it going well?"

"…Ah, yes, yes!"

"Are you perhaps wandering around today too?"

"Ah, well… no. I don't need to do that anymore."

I answered with a bitter smile.

In fact, what I had done this time was prioritize protecting the village, thinking that the academy would have its own heroes. After all, there were plenty of heroes and aspiring heroes around the academy.

But I was lucky that I managed to prevent the academy's attack as well. It really was a fortunate coincidence. On the other hand, it also indicated that the strength of the monsters and the beings could strike two places at once with a single totem, which was quite alarming.

"You don't need to do that anymore?"

"Yes."

She had previously dismissed it as nonsense, so I wondered if it had bothered her somewhat. It seemed that Orca was showing a bit of interest in my words.

Did she realize that many people were watching her from behind? They had somehow understood Yoon Hamin, but now with Orca showing interest and speaking to me, it felt like even more eyes were on us.

It wasn’t that I didn’t understand. If she was one of the top-tier students, one could assume she would try to expand friendships regardless. But now, it wasn’t just one, it was two, so it made sense to be startled.

“Shall we talk for a moment where we talked yesterday?”

“Ah, yes.”

I nodded and followed her. The buzzing atmosphere of the classroom seemed to be directed entirely at me.

Yoon Hamin stared blankly at Orca and me as we left the classroom.

Standing halfway up the stairs heading to the rooftop, I shyly stood in front of her. Until yesterday, it had felt like she was looking down at me from above, but today, Orca asked me to come up, and we faced each other at the same eye level.

“Is there something difficult that you can’t talk about?”

I paused, freezing. Had she not said the same thing yesterday?

I pondered whether to speak the truth or brush it off saying that it didn’t mean anything.

Because I had broken the totem, the monster invasion had become a non-issue, and no one would trust me enough to believe that I had left no evidence behind. Even Yoon Hamin was merely in a position of wanting to believe me; I knew that he didn’t truly believe it.

But still, since it was the same question I had brought up yesterday, I couldn’t say that I had just burned my hand while cooking.

After all, Yoon Hamin was also aware of the situation, and I didn’t want to lie to someone trying to show kindness. Our relationship wasn’t completely

non-existent; I was someone important to Yoon Hamin, who could suffer beside him.

“…Yes.”

Of course, even if I spoke, there were things I could say and things I could not.

For instance, I could tell about future events, hoping to avoid the immediate future I was facing.

However, if they asked about the source of that information or evidence of the totem, how could I answer them if they didn’t know that yet?

So, I had to exclude such things as much as possible from my answers.

If there were questions or curiosities, I focused on responding as best as I could, raising my tension to the maximum.

“Were you originally motivated to study?”

Catch off guard by the sudden mention of studying, I temporarily lost my train of thought and narrowed my brows.

It seemed understandable that Orca, being the next head of the Lamiris family who valued fairness, would appreciate those who worked hard.

Moreover, this was an excellent opportunity to build rapport, or so I thought.

“Yes…! I-I originally intended to study…!”

Contrary to my thoughts, Orca’s expression seemed to darken a bit. I had expected she would be pleased, but perhaps it was not as straightforward as I thought.

“Is it perhaps that the studying environment isn’t conducive? That it’s hard to study at home…?”

“Ah, no, things are fine now.”

“Now?”

“Yes.”

She seemed to find my response a bit odd and asked again, and I nodded immediately.

I had shown a lack of focus up until this exam, but this time I intended to show that I would work hard to win Orca’s favor.

In the story, Orca had never shown any interest in the last-place students, but if my actions made her show interest, it signified that I was already walking a different path from the original. So, I thought to take full advantage of it and continued speaking.

“Actually, I think I can manage the written part, but I can’t find a proper place to practice for the practical exam… Hehe.”

If I could build enough friendship with Orca, then perhaps when she faced a deadly situation, I might plead once more for her to listen to me and avoid d*ath.

As I answered with a sly smile, Orca hesitated for a moment before nodding with a slightly reluctant expression.

“True, even if you do well on the written exam, it would be difficult to turn things around unless you achieve similar results in the practical part.”

Orca seemed to contemplate for a moment, resting her hand on her chin as she pondered. Even while doing so, her gaze rested on my right hand, making me anxious about what she was thinking.

“By the way, that hand was injured not from training but from the story about the monster, right? Are monsters really out there?”

“…….”

Orca was a person capable of rational judgment, so she didn’t fully believe me.

She stood beside Yoon Hamin, who was kind-hearted and offered help, acting as a safety net so that he wouldn’t be deceived.

Were there monsters? I’m sorry, but I stopped the invasion myself.

Was there evidence? I couldn’t take a photo. Even if I did take one, how could I prove anything about the totem, and explaining how I discovered it would surely lead to trouble.

Still, I thought the best course was to repeat what I had told Yoon Hamin.

“There aren’t any. I stopped them.”

I lifted my hand slightly.

I couldn’t explain in detail about the totem, but I thought this explanation might suffice somehow.

I didn’t expect her to give me some grand statement like asking why I was going to such lengths for her to believe me. I just hoped she would say, “Oh, I see,” and let it go so that we could continue being friends.

“Is that so…”

But contrary to my hopes, Orca’s expression continued to darken.

“If it’s difficult to study at home next time, I’ll lend you the training ground in my mansion. If needed, we can also get Yoon Hamin involved, and while it may be difficult to work on abilities, we can at least make up for it with body techniques…”

“Really?”

“Yes, well. Since you have a training uniform, I think that would work well. It wouldn’t make sense for someone who is trying hard to have nothing

available.”

“Thank you…!”

It was an unexpected windfall.

I thought it would be great just to become friends, but to be invited to her home was an unimaginable stroke of luck that made my joy overflow. My face likely showed it.

“Take care since your hand still hurts. You’ll have to deal with being in last place this exam, I guess.”

“Ah…”

At Orca’s wry smile, I sighed and looked at my right hand.

Given its condition, practicing was impossible. As I thought this, she advised me.

“Next time, don’t do anything that could injure yourself again. If you do, it will really be impossible to avoid being in last place.”

“…Ah, understood.”

As I responded with a somewhat sullen voice while watching her back as she descended the stairs to return to the classroom, I let out a small groan.

I wondered if the issue stemmed from breaking the totem along with injuring my palm.

No, the burn would heal quickly; I could practice fast over the weekend, right?

I intended to quickly catch Orca, but before I could, the bell signaling the start of class echoed through the hallway.

“Ah!”

I hurried my steps toward the classroom.

I could have entered almost at the same moment as Orca, but I couldn’t continue the previous conversation.

Ch. 19 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 19

Orca Lamiris was the eldest daughter of the Lamiris family.

There was a younger brother, but he was kept hidden as much as possible within the Lamiris household, making it extremely rare for anyone to know of his existence.

Because of this, Orca introduced herself as the only daughter and lived her life that way.

She didn’t expect to be let into the house, but she thought that since the younger brother likely wouldn’t come out here, it didn’t matter much.

The mansion of the Lamiris family was very spacious.

With a separately maintained lawn and connecting stone paths between the buildings, one couldn’t help but think of how grand the household was.

Perhaps it was right to say that as the daughter of a wealthy family, her expression always carried a softness that seemed to exude calmness.

In a remote area of the property, a space was prepared for training, and I stood there wearing the training uniform provided by Orca.

Wearing the white uniform with a black belt around my waist, I felt as if I should be meditating.

While Yoon Hamin and Orca suited the black belt, I felt the white belt matched me better.

Since the colors used by the Lamiris family were limited to black, I had no choice but to accept that.

“Take this.”

At those words, I turned my gaze to the hand Orca extended.

Curious about the strap, I absentmindedly grabbed it, and Orca took the strap from her wrist and used it to tie her hair up.

Ah, she wants me to tie my hair.

Once I was sure about how to use the hair tie I had never received before, I carefully followed her lead and pulled my hair up.

I couldn’t understand how such a voluminous head of hair could be tied up with this strap.

Was there some unknown physical law at work?

While I fumbled, Yoon Hamin stared at me intently.

What are you looking at?

As I questioned, I noticed Orca, who had tied her own hair, was also looking at me.

“Kanna, just hold still, I’ll do it for you.”

“…Ah, yes.”

I removed my hands from my hair and stood at attention.

Then, Orca grabbed my hair and began to tidy it up again.

“Ugh…”

“Just a little longer. It needs to be tightly tied.”

As I squeezed my eyes shut and waited, Orca gathered my hair into one.

I had washed and dried my hair before, but I had never styled it like this, so I felt quite clumsy.

“It looks good. Now, shall we start training? Let’s begin with the simplest body techniques.”

“Yes, sounds good.”

I nodded, shaking my head left and right once.

As the scattered hair came together, I felt a heavy weight that was quite addictive.

“…So, where do we start?”

I asked with a bit of eagerness, and Orca glanced at my hands.

After unwrapping the bandage, it seemed she was quite concerned about the stains left from my burns.

After all, she had shown some worry over my injured hands yesterday and the day before as well.

Orca took a deep breath and stood in front of me.

“Yoon Hamin will tell you how to do it from the side.”

“Oh, okay.”

Yoon Hamin, standing in a position like a judge, nodded.

“First, defense is important; it’s vital to roll your body to lessen the impact when you’re caught and thrown. If the opponent releases you, you can roll to reduce the shock.”

He said this while glancing at Orca.

Then Orca turned her head and extended her hand toward Yoon Hamin.

“It would be easier if you see an example first.”

Yoon Hamin swallowed hard and reached out his hand.

In an instant, Orca’s hand shot out quickly, hooking around Yoon Hamin’s arm and flipping him over.

With a swish, his body flew through the air and headed straight for the ground.

If it were me, I would have landed hard, but that didn’t happen to him.

The moment he hit the ground, his body tilted slightly, and Orca’s arm, which had been holding him, wobbled a bit.

While the thud of the impact was unavoidable, I was amazed to find that the sound was noticeably reduced.

I knew that to score points in practice, one had to do it like this, but I had never done it myself before.

“Did you see that well?”

Orca asked while brushing her hands off, and I nodded.

Then Orca gestured.

“The moment I grab you is when it starts.”

After saying that, as soon as I reached out my hand, my vision violently twisted.

“Whoa, ack!”

With no time to react, I was thrown to the ground and closed my eyes tightly while clutching my backside.

“…Ugh, that hurts…”

I felt frustrated that my body was weak when I couldn’t even use my abilities properly.

“Kanna, you’re not completely in the air; you’re being held by my arm, so you just need to twist your body from there.”

“Oh, got it.”

Even though it felt like tears were welling up from the pain, there was nothing I could do.

In the end, body techniques required using your body, so I had to get used to it somehow.

Still, it was okay since I could fall multiple times here.

If points were at stake and I showed such a disgraceful sight among those who believed I was destined to come in last, what difference would it make? There would only be mocking expressions in return.

Determined to show my best next time, I gritted my teeth through the pain and stood up again.

I slightly adjusted my uniform and took a deep breath.

After steeling myself by looking at Orca, I extended my arm.

Thud!

“Ah!”

Thud!

“Ugh!”

Thud!

“Ugh…”

I truly felt like tears were about to fall.

I tried to twist as much as possible, but aside from bumping into a different part of the body, nothing seemed to change.

Reducing the shock was impossible; the recent impact on my hip left a persistent tingling sensation.

“…Kanna.”

Just then, Yoon Hamin, who couldn’t stand it anymore, called my name.

“Eh?”

When I paused and turned to look, Yoon Hamin cleared his throat and spoke.

“If the roll is too difficult, do you want to try attacking first? That might actually be easier.”

After hearing that, I paused for a moment to think.

Orca also seemed to consider it for a moment before nodding.

“Sure, attacking might be better. Of course, it could also be easier. However, if Kanna has weak strength, the opponent might withstand it, so it could be a bit challenging.”

“Really?”

Wasn’t attacking supposed to be easier? I had thought that before.

Yoon Hamin had also said something similar.

But Orca looked at me with an advising tone, as if it wasn’t the case.

“After all, body techniques are practical skills, right? Yoon Hamin may not know since he’s strong, but in practice, points are important, and often people struggle to not give the opponent points. For instance, when the opponent has to be thrown, they might intentionally adopt an awkward posture to prevent being thrown, or they might dodge to the side.”

I focused on her words.

“In that case, they won’t even get the chance to perform a roll, meaning they don’t lose many points, while the one who fails to attack will face significant losses. It’s usually best to aim for mutual techniques, but in the case of Kanna….”

Orca trailed off, but I felt I understood the general idea.

As if she had no intention of dwelling on it here, Orca shrugged her shoulders.

“Then, would you like to try with Yoon Hamin? Given the weight, it should feel like you’re pushing against someone who is resisting.”

“Uh, me?”

Yoon Hamin looked surprised, but I thought if that was the case, it was fine.

If the opponent was trying to slam me to the ground, then I should surely stand my ground against that.

Doing my best in both practical skills and theoretical ones should at least earn me a rank up or two.

I quietly stared at Yoon Hamin.

Eventually, realizing he needed to brace himself, he smiled wryly as he gazed at me.

“I won’t hold back.”

“…If you hold back, I probably won’t even be able to throw you.”

I replied like that and looked at the arm Yoon Hamin extended.

Orca stood in the judge’s position and began detailing the postures one by one.

“Turn halfway, make sure your arm is touching his right shoulder, and as you bend your back like a lever…”

After organizing her words one by one, I gritted my teeth and exerted all my strength.

I grabbed his arm, spun around, and pressed my body against him.

I extended my wrist in front, bent my waist, and as I pushed my hip into the opponent’s feet, they lifted off the ground; then, I sent them down onto the floor without hesitation.

I didn’t have to worry about getting hurt, so it felt comfortable.

The moment I hesitated, it would be the moment my waist got injured.

Thinking that way, I tried to throw him, but it ended up finishing while sticking closely to his body with a thud.

His feet hadn’t left the ground, which was what caused this situation.

“…Oof.”

I trembled.

Is this what it feels like to resist? I withdrew my hand cautiously.

Orca explained once again from the side.

“See? It’s not just about weight; you can feel it’s also about height, right?”

“Yeah…”

“It’s probably the same feeling when you’re trying to withstand someone of a similar weight class.”

“What should I do then?”

I asked, and Orca went back to Yoon Hamin and called for his hand.

Half-heartedly, he stretched out his arm, smiling wryly.

At that moment, Orca grabbed his arm and moved fluidly as she had just explained.

The difference was, I hadn’t thrown Yoon Hamin, whereas Orca had thrown him.

“Do you see the differences?”

“…Uh, no, I don’t understand.”

As I replied like that, Orca pretended to throw someone into the air.

“When you push your hip out like this, Kanna, you just lower your head, but at that moment, if you slightly hook the opponent’s foot, it’ll help. If it doesn’t seem to throw them easily, you can hook a bit more strongly.”

So that’s how it is.

Of course, if the weight class is an issue, it won’t work well, but it felt impressive to see that to some extent, this kind of technique can cover for that.

“Let’s try it again. Once you can throw Yoon Hamin, you’ll be able to easily throw someone of average strength during the exam as well.”

“Sounds good. I’ll give it a try!”

I was filled with eagerness.

If I truly could escape coming in last, I might be able to change my current life as well.

“…Hah, you called me just to use me like this.”

“Are you not happy about it?”

As Yoon Hamin sighed, Orca shot back.

He immediately shook his head and smiled wryly.

“No, I don’t mind. After all, I know how to do rolls, so it’s no problem. Helping someone who’s trying their best isn’t hard at all.”

Yoon Hamin said that and looked at me.

I kept my mouth shut tight and nodded.

That was an action to reaffirm my own determination.

“Then this time, I’ll do it properly.”

“Yeah.”

Yoon Hamin lightly responded to my words as he extended his arm.

I grabbed that arm and twisted my body once more.

Thud!

However, I still felt a bit regretful at being blocked during the part where I needed to throw Yoon Hamin.

I tried to hook his foot, but something was in the way, and I could only push my hip against him while bending my waist.

“……”

A slight silence enveloped the dojo.

Orca continued with her explanations, while Yoon Hamin excused himself for a moment, saying he needed to take a break.

“Kanna, when you turn, your legs need to be like this…”

It felt like loading up my practical scores would be quite a distant prospect.

In other words, while the content wasn’t hard, my body didn’t seem to follow through.

“Yes, okay.”

I nodded and Orca stepped in to hold her ground in place of Yoon Hamin, who had briefly stepped away.

While Orca didn’t manage to throw him perfectly, once her body began to move a little, it felt like there was hope.

“……!”

“It seems like it’s finally working. You need to make it faster from this point. If it pauses or slows down, you probably won’t be able to throw them due to the weight.”

“Yes!”

For the first time, I felt excited at the thought of escaping from last place.

Ch. 20 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 20

On Saturday, Kanna’s training took place, and Sunday was designated for individual study, causing the weekend to vanish in an instant.

After work on Monday, just as Kanna was saying goodbye and leaving for home, Orca murmured while watching her back.

“…It seems like she brightened up a bit.”

It felt a bit strange because I never thought she would harbor such feelings for Kanna, whom she initially treated indifferently.

Did she sense something in the meantime? Even though it was a situation where one couldn’t argue back, seeing her try to view things positively made my heart soften a little.

“Right? She didn’t seem that fond of her before, but I guess they’ve become quite close?”

When I casually asked that, Orca shouldered her bag without answering.

Suddenly, the sight of her maintaining silence made me unconsciously shut my mouth too. I was merely escaping the now quiet classroom.

Once outside the building, I noticed the stairs at the main entrance. Just as I was about to take a step, Orca, who had been silent until now, finally spoke.

“What kind of person do you think Kanna is?”

I groaned at the unexpected question.

Asking about a person and who they are honestly felt like a slight against that person, after all.

Of course, with the premise that it's my own perspective, I could just share my view, but thinking about it, if that person's essence isn't what I say, it bothered me slightly.

But before I could respond, Orca continued speaking.

"She was last place, came and went without a word until now, I guess."

Her blue eyes seemed to chill down.

"Students who come in last at the academy know that there's no good future for them, so they all keep their distance. Still, I thought they'd stick together in their group."

I knew at least that much too.

Still, I thought the upper tiers would do their thing, while the lower tiers would do theirs. That way, the groups would form networks for their future hero lives.

There was nothing wrong with prioritizing mutually beneficial relationships instead of simply giving to one side, so there was no one to criticize that.

Maybe individuals are hard to know except for myself. It's natural that you can't know deeply without thinking about it.

"…She looked like she didn't want to change. She seemed like she didn't want to do anything. She emanated an atmosphere of being satisfied with her current position."

Orca's eyes turned toward me.

"The last place couldn't associate with even the lowest group. So… couldn't it be that she couldn't change? She wanted to change, but wasn't the environment torturing Kanna?"

Orca sighed.

“It’s still early in the semester, so I can’t say for sure… but if that’s the case, then…”

She was hesitant.

Riding on the dynamics of the atmosphere, if she opened her eyes to her values, she could live normally. But that wouldn’t change the flow.

What she wanted was to change the environment so that even those in last place could have the will to try.

I agreed with that. In a place where one cannot change anything alone, enduring solitude would typically lead to depression and helplessness.

Kanna likely lost her motivation due to circumstances that she couldn’t change, no matter how she tried to escape. So I replied quietly.

“If Kanna can’t do it alone, then we should help her.”

That was all I could offer.

Just then, as I tried to move once more, Orca quietly continued speaking, seemingly having more to say.

“Do you know why Kanna’s hands are like that?”

“…They say she did it trying to stop a monster. Why?”

When I answered honestly, Orca paused.

“Do you really believe that? There’s no evidence for it.”

“I ask you to believe, and you believe…”

I shrank back in response to her slightly accusatory tone, and a sigh escaped from beside me.

“It seems her home isn’t an environment for studying either. She keeps lingering outside instead of going home. Also, she might have hurt her hands, either by someone else or by herself.”

Orca seemed to pierce through something with her sharp gaze. I found it hard to gauge whether it was insightful or just too far-fetched.

Honestly, unless I directly asked Kanna, I couldn’t be certain about anything, so it would be foolish to jump to conclusions.

Nonetheless.

The thought that someone might have caused it or that she might have tormented her own hands worried me.

If it were the former, it would be a family problem; if the latter, then likely an academy issue.

Thinking that she might have done something due to excessive despair from being unable to withstand her own helplessness was somewhat pitiful. My heart was drawn to it.

Yet, I didn’t want to call this feeling pity. Since she wished for friendship and was trying to muster the courage to change, treating her with pity would likely distort all relationships.

“…If that’s the case, I’ll cut that out for you.”

That was all I could do. I couldn’t meddle in someone else’s family matters, but I could at least change the atmosphere of the academy.

After all, who wouldn’t listen to the top student?

“I knew you’d say that,” Orca chuckled.

Leaving that laughter behind, I recalled Kanna’s expression.

Her eyes, which had sunk so low in gloom that she couldn’t even see the ground, gradually appeared to rise and brighten again.

Was I just thinking too much of myself? I thought I could take care of the people around me if I just did well, but if I couldn’t even make a single friend at the academy—

In an instant, my expression twisted into a frown. The image of someone who gave up their life arose, sending chills down my spine.

“Yoon Hamin?”

Because of that, Orca beside me seemed taken aback.

“No, it’s fine.”

It couldn’t end like this. It just couldn’t.

*

In front of the mirror, ivory hair and violet eyes stared back at me. When I sighed, Kanna Aurora in the mirror sighed as well.

The unease wouldn’t fade.

Naturally, I had turned the story of this world upside down from the very beginning, and now, the only information I had left was what the monster desired and what power it possessed. Perhaps, with some luck, I might get a piece of information right.

However, it was wise not to expect such a thing.

“…Ha.”

The choices that seemed good at the moment might turn out differently later.

The story had maintained a good flow all the way to the end, only to be shattered into ruin at the last moment.

That was frightening.

How long could I continue to live? If someone near the barrier died, the next would be someone inside, then an immature academy student, and finally, even heroes would perish.

The protagonist, Yoon Hamin, would survive to the end, but everyone else, including Orca, would d*e—no one would be exempt from that.

If I wanted to stop that, it probably had to start from the beginning.

The world's destruction was plainly written behind a story I thought would ensure the protagonist's happiness. I clenched my lips.

Surrounded by my circumstances, I felt like I was gradually rotting away, but thanks to some changes, I could breathe a little easier.

Yoon Hamin and Orca. Thinking of the two who'd help me reminded me that they were indeed dazzling protagonist and heroine.

But if I were to be greedy, I wished they would help me just a bit more.

Was that even possible?

I likely hadn't built up trust because I acted hastily without leaving any evidence and because I had pretended not to have a clear reason for wanting them to smile.

In fact, even now, asking for help, I found it hard to gauge what exactly I needed their help with. Perhaps if I changed slowly without straying from the larger framework, it might work, but due to messing it all up from the start, I couldn't predict the future.

I didn't want to d*e. And if I could survive, I wanted to change this ending too.

So, to change the ending, I had to change everything from start to finish.

I needed to change my current situation, so my words would carry weight. So that someday when I shouted the truth, everyone could think that my words could indeed be valid.

After coming out of the bathroom, I sat back down at the makeshift desk and began studying again. The number of underlined textbooks grew, racing through the lines.

I desperately wished that my notes, both theoretical and practical, would be enough to escape from last place, just once.

Now that it had come to this, I was just thankful that exams were scheduled weekly. It meant there would be another chance at challenges once a week.

Since I was at rock bottom, there was nowhere to retreat. With no further down to go, all that was left was to look up and run.

So, deciding to think positively, I didn't lift my b*tt from the seat until the moon was full.

*

It was already Tuesday. With the exam ahead, I was tense and vowed to work hard again today as I put on my school uniform and walked to the academy. The study I had done up until today was the scope of the exam tomorrow, so there was nothing that I could let slip.

Perhaps the academy wanted to scare away students looking for shortcuts before their streak of luck ran out.

There were weekly exams, and what I hated was the notion that I had to come last every week, but now I felt willing because I believed there was a chance to overturn that even once.

If my efforts bore fruit, though the teachers and other students might not notice, the relationship with Yoon Hamin and Orca could improve. I grabbed my pounding heart as I climbed the stairs.

However, like a sudden terror, I caught sight of students rushing out in droves.

"…Everyone, emergency! All students in the building, please move to the gym!"

Before I could even climb the stairs to the academy building, I saw a teacher shouting at the top of their lungs from above. Amid the chaos as everyone ran in panic, I widened my eyes and groaned.

All I could see were students heading down the stairs and across the playground toward the gym.

“What’s happening—”

While I was surprised and turning my head back and forth, someone grabbed my arm and pulled me hard.

“Kanna! Don’t just freeze here!”

At Yoon Hamin’s shout, I followed him like I was enchanted without even realizing it.

My gaze wavered.

Why suddenly? That was a foolish question. The story had been derailed from the beginning, and from then on, it was only obvious that there were futures I wasn’t aware of.

“…Ah.”

Was everything due to my own doing?

I began to worry about whether I could handle it.

Ch. 21 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 21

Students of the Academy began to gather one by one in the large gymnasium.

“Due to cracks in the Barrier and the invasion of monsters, Academy students, please wait here!!”

At the teachers’ cries, the gymnasium filled with students began to stir with unease. And above all, the one who could not accept this situation was none other than Orca.

“W-what… the Barrier…”

She groaned while staring blankly at the teacher who had finished the announcement.

Given that they belonged to one of the families responsible for managing the Barrier, it seemed to have come as quite a shock.

Their family was certainly supposed to have done their job properly, but the look on her face suggested she didn’t want to believe why this was happening.

Since Orca felt that way, other students exhibited similar expressions.

“Wait a second.”

Yoon Hamin turned his head back and forth for a moment before grabbing me and weaving through the crowd. Being pulled along unexpectedly, I

squeezed past the students and finally managed to reach a corner where there were fewer people.

Yoon Hamin scanned the surroundings and confirmed that no one was looking at him before he fixed his gaze on me.

“…Did you know?”

“No.”

“Why? You talked like you knew before!”

That was true.

However, since I had already used my one chance to prevent the initial incident, I had to answer that I knew nothing about what would happen next.

If the monster changed its mind and attacked in a different way, there would be no way for me to know that.

It’s not like I would be given a revised edition that presented different information about what I had read, so naturally, I could never have imagined such a situation would arise. Normally, there would be some time until the next attack, but that wasn’t the case now.

“…Kanna, tell me honestly. People are in danger right now.”

“I-I really didn’t know this time. I thought if I just managed to fend it off this time, I could handle it somehow…”

If I had known it would turn out this way, perhaps I should have just let the Barrier be destroyed. That thought crossed my mind. But soon after, I recalled that it was a foolish thought.

How many would believe my words in the first place? They wouldn’t suddenly deploy heroes to such a place.

I didn’t make a wrong choice. I wanted to believe that.

“Then what’s this about you hurting your hand?”

“……”

When I tightly shut my mouth, Yoon Hamin also fell silent and groaned.

Until now, he had reassured me that it was okay not to have proof and that he would trust me, but at this moment when something had actually occurred, I felt trust slipping away as I remained silent.

Even if no evidence remained, I felt like Yoon Hamin would trust me, but faced with this reality, I found that was not the case at all.

At that moment, I was relaxed, and I couldn’t brush off my concern.

I realized that was as far as it went.

“Kanna, I really want to trust you, but… despite your pain, there seems to be a limit to that trust.”

I had no answer to that statement.

“If you speak normally and truthfully, someone will understand. By acting this way, you won’t achieve anything you desire.”

My heart dropped with a thud. I lowered my head to hide the crumpled expression on my face.

I knew it. I had been too hasty.

I just wanted to change the future.

Since not many had offered to help, I had been alone for a long time and momentarily forgot that. My judgment had blurred, and because of that, I failed to gain the trust of Yoon Hamin, who would believe in me.

Even if someone took a picture of a purple feather, it wouldn’t help discern whether it was a totem or not, and I felt I had dealt with it too lightly.

I regretted not showing Yoon Hamin the totem while explaining it, someone who had never encountered a totem before.

“I-I only knew that one thing.”

I bit my lips and spoke. Yoon Hamin stared at me with an expression as if to say he understood.

“Now you’re not alone, so there’s no need for that.”

“…Really.”

“I’ll keep watching you without resorting to self-harm.”

“There’s no need for that…!”

I raised my voice as softly as I could to avoid drawing attention from those around me. My tightly clenched fist trembled.

“W-well, it’s true that I broke it with my ability, but it’s not self-harm. I understand that you can’t believe me, but really, that’s all I knew… this time I really didn’t know…”

As I ground my teeth in frustration, it seemed to catch Yoon Hamin’s attention.

“Then how did you know that?”

However, it wasn’t a good turn of events, and now I had to think of another explanation.

“Let’s say you’re right. How did you know a monster would invade there? How did you know what the totem looked like, where it would be, or even the timing of it?”

Just like that, he asked the very questions he was curious about, and my mouth firmly shut, refusing to open.

I couldn’t say, “I know the future.” or “I know your end.” The former no longer held true, and the latter would only provoke resentment.

I stood there, silently trembling my lips.

In the end, it was all something I had brought upon myself, so there were no words left to say.

“…Anyway, it seems you can’t show the totem, and even if you did, I wouldn’t know how you could, which makes me a bit curious.”

“…….”

“Assuming you are speaking on the grounds of trust, that is.”

The instant I heard those words, I felt my heart tighten. His cold voice brushed past my ears. At the same time, his footsteps stepped back.

That last remark meant he could no longer trust me.

Students at the Academy who aspired to be heroes could step out into action behind the heroes if they were acknowledged by the teachers to some extent. This way, they could slowly gain real experience and be deployed into the field right after graduation.

Since Yoon Hamin was one of those eligible, he walked toward the podium where the teachers were standing.

His figure disappeared into the crowd and was no longer visible.

I blankly stared at my hands. My now healed hand was proudly showing itself, as if asking what had happened.

“…….”

If nothing had happened, I think Yoon Hamin would have hesitated but ultimately would have chosen to trust me. But due to the convenience of the unfolding events, it seemed I had lost trust because of an attack I could not foresee.

I might have appeared as a lunatic who claimed to have stopped something when there was no incident, shouting that the monster would only appear when it was convenient for them.

It felt like I was the shepherd boy.

“Then let’s select the upper-tier students first! Please join quickly!”

At the teacher’s shout, the upper-tier students, including Yoon Hamin and Orca, hurriedly left the gym following the teacher’s guidance.

I was alone again.

I only had two friends, and with both of them gone, I felt a bit sad about being alone once more.

But it was okay. I believed they would return.

“…….”

Would they come back? I didn’t know.

Even if they returned to the Academy, they might not return to me, which made my heart uneasy.

“Then everyone, please stay hidden here!”

Several teachers checked the student roster and counted with their pens.

I squeezed back through the crowd and returned to my spot to let everyone know I was okay. I didn’t want to be seen as a nuisance to the teachers in this kind of situation.

Even while doing that, I pondered. How could Yoon Hamin trust me again?

In this changed situation, there wasn’t much left that I could inform in advance, and it seemed difficult to change the situation again.

As I fell into gloom once more, I heard what the teachers were discussing. Since there were no kids to chatter, it made sense that my attention was directed toward the teachers.

“There are monsters gathered near the Barrier? What about the victims?”

“They say someone who was just jogging got caught up in it, but their fate is still unknown.”

The moment I heard those words, my thoughts momentarily stopped. Then, I quickly began to churn my mind to find the discrepancy in that statement.

There had definitely been something that sounded awkward; I narrowed my brows to confirm what it was.

Monsters enjoyed hearing someone scream. They liked to isolate people.

That’s why they wanted to isolate Yoon Hamin, who, more than anyone else, had seemed like a hero, and they ultimately succeeded.

There was a method that such monsters frequently employed. A straightforward yet very effective approach that a hero could not overlook.

“…It’s not a decoy.”

The moment I heard what the teacher said, I approached the homeroom teacher.

“…Teacher, is it possible that the monsters appeared in one location?”

When I asked that, the teacher paused for a moment, seemingly caught off guard by my sudden question, then reluctantly nodded and replied.

“Yes, but is there something going on…?”

The moment I heard that, I felt suffocated inside. In my frustration, I turned abruptly and dashed toward the gym's exit.

"Kanna?! Kanna!"

Given that this time, they had never focused on just one spot, I assumed it would be the same this time.

This time, I had to confirm directly, or else I was sure they wouldn't even give me a chance to talk next time. I could still ask for help from the teachers afterward.

Clutching my pounding heart, I kicked the gym door open and gazed out at the sprawling grassy field.

"……."

I spun my gaze around. There had to be signs of a monster appearing somewhere, and I needed to find it.

The ominous purple magical power was somewhere, wrapped around the area.

"Kanna! You can't leave the gym right now!"

Teacher Lucia had followed me all the way and grabbed my arm, determined to fulfill her role as a teacher.

I turned sharply to face her and tightly shut my mouth.

"Te-teacher."

"Yes?"

"The m-monster might invade here."

I wasn't entirely certain, but I shared that information just in case. Monsters weren't unintelligent like beasts, nor were they stupid snatchers relying solely on one method to act.

If such a creature insisted on a single method, it meant that it was a guaranteed effective strategy.

Their reason for attacking the Academy, where heroes and aspiring heroes congregated, was simple. Even if the monster could be dealt with swiftly, it was to tie down a few more people at that moment.

However, this time felt a little different. The order seemed off.

Sending monsters near the Barrier first and stalling—was that solely for that purpose? Or to lure strong heroes into that location?

I swallowed hard, glancing around uneasily. Then the teacher hesitated for a moment before once again grabbing my arm.

“What are you talking about? Do you even know how far we are from the incident site? You must know the distance between the outskirts and the central area, don’t you?”

“Th-that’s true…”

“Kanna, if you keep acting unilaterally like this, you could lose many points as a hero.”

“…I’m sorry.”

With my homeroom teacher’s slight scolding, the only thing I could say was to apologize.

Just as I was feeling small and silently trying to follow the teacher.

Suddenly, a glaring flash lit up behind me.

My head turned sharply, and the teacher’s did the same.

[Crreeeak.]

The massive figure of the monster suddenly appeared at the Academy.

It would be accurate to say it just popped up without any prior approach.

“…Oh my god.”

At its appearance, the teacher looked up, raising her head to behold the gargantuan monster.

Ch. 22 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 22

The emergence of the gigantic monster threw everyone into a panic. Lucia’s pupils were visibly shaking.

It was as if she sent me a look that questioned how I knew, but in reality, she was just trembling in the face of the monster.

For me, it was something that would eventually happen, but not for them.

The situation was so extraordinary that both teachers and students had no choice but to be confused.

It wasn’t entirely unheard of for a few monsters to slip through due to cracks, but it was exceptional for the barrier to break and monsters to rush in from beyond.

Moreover, they had thought that the monster was just a beast imbued with unrefined magical power outside the barrier, and believed that the monster wouldn’t reach the academy if it didn’t charge in.

So they had tried to confine everything within the gym and control it all at once. They thought that as long as the monster wasn’t flying through the sky, it wouldn’t reach them here.

But the opponent wasn’t a mere monster; it was an intelligent creature. It seemed possible to manipulate the monster like a toy.

Yet still, despite a certain level of intuition, when I faced the building-sized monster, fear crept in. The tension coursing through my spine felt like it was binding me, making it hard to move.

Setting aside the choking sensation, the teacher turned her head and shouted inside.

“Everyone, run away!!”

At her loud voice, both the panicked teacher and students rushed to any exit they could find—be it a door or a window—to escape the gym.

Lucia, not the type strong in practical matters from the beginning, couldn’t help but step back. Even if a part of the power was at the barrier, this was the academy.

It could be assumed that the power would rarely falter in this place, the future of citizens and the heroes of tomorrow.

“Kanna! Hurry and evacuate too!”

Hearing that voice, I hesitated for a moment.

Would there really be a way out if I ran? I tried stepping forward,

“…What the heck is that…”

The moment I heard the teacher’s voice, my head turned back towards the monster. The monster let out a growl, scratching its neck and then jerkily turned its head.

Its form was different from an animal, but its torso and legs were clearly distinguishable. The black skin had purple lines glowing vividly.

It had four legs, and it didn’t seem to have a visible neck. It looked like it was born just to crush people rather than to consume something, which made it feel even more malevolent.

After seeing the monster’s appearance, I hesitated for a moment and finally pulled out a piece of information from my memory.

“…Ah.”

I suddenly turned my head sharply.

As soon as I thought it would be pointless to tell Lucia, I ran out.

If they didn’t know anything about that monster, it was obvious that too many casualties would occur right here, so I had to inform them. Since there was more than one monster, heroes, teachers, and students would undoubtedly be scattered.

Surely there would be those who fled, but there would also be those who chose to fight.

In an instant, someone flew toward the monster. With a crunch, it seemed they trampled the monster’s body, but eventually, the wounds began to heal quickly, indicating it wouldn’t easily back down.

I searched for those who hadn’t yet joined the fight. But the heroes, called such, seemed to have already rushed towards the incoming monsters as they were nowhere to be seen.

Fighting teachers followed behind, and those who couldn’t fight were leading students to the shelters. Faced with the devastating scene, I broke out in a cold sweat, turning my head back and forth.

I began to worry that if the monsters were invading the area surrounding the academy as well, it would turn into a complete mess.

“d*mn.”

“Hey! Student! Run away! The heroes are already trying to hold them back!”

What? Hold them back?

In this extraordinary situation, facing an unusual monster, I wanted to tell them they shouldn’t be so relaxed.

Of course, since I was the last in the academy and appeared to be spouting nonsense because I didn’t want to take a test, no one would pay attention to

me from that moment on.

“Teacher!”

“Huh?”

At my shout, the teacher, who had been urging everyone to move quickly, let out a stunned voice.

“We have to cut the purple lines on the monster! That’s where its magical circuit is!”

The male teacher’s pupils shook violently. His expression seemed to show he didn’t understand what I was saying.

As I prepared to repeat myself by taking a deep breath, the male teacher abruptly reached out a hand to stop me.

“Wait, where did you get that information?”

His fierce appearance scared me, causing me to flinch.

“…Well, um, it felt like there was flowing magic! A certain teacher told me!”

I stammered, desperately trying to cover myself. In such a frantic situation, I realized that there was no time for back and forth to verify the truth, and he ran off somewhere.

“Where are you going so fast?”

At the teacher’s shout, I nodded and headed in a different direction. Since there were multiple monsters, I needed to inform the teachers or the heroes starting to fight.

This particular monster had to be defeated by cutting the purple lines flowing along its outer body, rather than destroying a core placed instead of its heart.

Of course, there was a core inside. The problem was that the body was too thick, solid, and possessed regenerative abilities, making it difficult to reach the core easily.

The fortunate aspect was how sturdy the monster's body was.

For a vein to flow, a certain level of softness was required, but ignoring that and being only solid led to the magical pathways being revealed on the surface, showing their form.

Rather than cutting deeply, it was about how many lines I could cut quickly.

"Teacher!!"

I grabbed the arm of another teacher from another grade, someone I had never faced before, and raised my voice again.

I couldn't fight. I was far too weak to be of help. But even if I didn't directly fight, if I could help in some way like this, I would be satisfied.

So I searched for teachers. The once struggling heroes and teachers began to hear and try with all their might, like grasping at straws, and thanks to that, progress was made in defeating the monster.

The monsters that invaded the academy were quickly being dealt with.

Those who were slow teamed up to cut all the pathways connecting their legs at once. In the instant they were cut, the monster's body couldn't flow with magic anymore, became stiff, and fell down.

Thud, thud. The corpses repeatedly fell to the ground.

No matter how monstrous they were, wouldn't targeting the academy directly have been a bit too arrogant?

"…What a relief."

There was no need to flee far. Already, I had navigated through the battlefield, teaching how to deal with the unfamiliar monster, and based on

that, we had begun to defeat the monsters, transforming the gym, which had been a dangerous area just moments ago, into a safe zone once more.

Of course, those who had experienced a monster suddenly appearing in the air probably wouldn’t think that way.

Even so, if they could be dealt with so swiftly, it would be clear that the creatures would quickly realize they were wasting their power for nothing. The monsters, with their strategies now widely shared, would effectively become useless.

Once this issue was resolved, another problem presented itself to me.

I had covered up by saying a teacher informed me, but if someone were to ask me to verify that fact, I worried about what I would say.

As always, knowing information that no one else did required a source.

In fact, this information was gained only after many citizens died and several heroes fell in the storyline. Thus, even if the source of this information was questioned, I would have no grounds to argue.

After confirming that no one was around, I tousled my hair.

“How did I even know this?”

Just as I tried to tidy my messy hair, I heard a voice from behind where no one had been just moments ago.

“Really? I’m very curious how you found out.”

The moment I snapped my head around, the opponent’s hand wrapped around my neck.

I think I heard a crack. Shock widened my eyes, and the fact that my breath was cut off left me in a state of convulsion.

In this soundless situation, the corners of the opponent’s lips were upturned.

“I’ve been watching you closely, haven’t I? You’re the one who also broke my feather on the wall. Seeing you act like you know, you must be the one who found what was placed in a barely visible spot.”

“……!”

Upon hearing that, I realized the opponent was a creature. Despite being slightly smaller than me, they possessed a terrifying strength that lifted me by the neck.

Black hair, black pupils surrounded by crimson irises filled me with fear.

“Oh, don’t worry. There’s no one around.”

Hearing that, I couldn’t help but feel despair at the fact that I couldn’t call for help.

“How did you find out? It was supposed to be a trump card hidden from humanity. I thought at least hundreds of thousands would d*e before anyone found out…”

The sharp row of teeth was revealed alongside her smile.

I tried to grasp her arm that held my neck in an attempt to escape.

Crackle. Crackle.

Since my body lifted, I couldn’t perform the techniques I had learned, and my ability, which merely caused burns, seemed ineffective regardless.

I gritted my teeth and summoned my magical power. I thought it was better than dying, even if it cost me.

Crackle, crackle!

I don’t want to d*e.

“Your struggling is cute.”

While I desperately sent electric currents through my body, the creature grinned and tightened her grip on my neck. At the same time, I heard a crack as something snapped.

Ch. 23 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 23

Creak. Creak.

An unpleasant sound of something not fitting together properly irritated my ears.

As my mind gradually returned, my hand caught my attention.

“…Ah.”

No, it was something hard to call a hand.

Even if something was stepping on it, I didn’t think it would look like this.

Whether it was bl**d or something else, my skin had turned purple and was crushed.

“Ahhhh…!”

In that moment, disbelief and pain mixed together in a scream that surged from my mouth.

As I stared at my trembling hand, in the moment I embraced that hand, screaming out, a voice reached my ears.

“Ah, you’re awake?”

“Ugh…!”

At the moment I heard that voice, scenes flashed through my mind, shaking me.

I had successfully repelled the monster’s invasion, yet I was caught while contemplating how I got this information from a distance.

I had been dragged here without receiving help from anyone.

I didn’t have the mental capacity to confirm where this place was.

My mind was struggling, as if it might collapse at any moment.

“Ugh…”

A monster stained in black.

Being too conspicuous was a problem.

In my desperation to survive, in my ambition to change the outcome of this world, I had foolishly attracted the monster’s attention.

Was I receiving the retribution for that?

Was I paying for a retribution that didn’t suit me?

I stretched out the arm I had held tightly.

The wet, uneven ground indicated that this wasn’t indoors, giving me a cold sensation.

Using my arm, I wanted to escape anywhere, as I already knew that being here meant I wouldn’t see anything good.

But perhaps, like my retribution, it was wrong to wish for that. As I was about to move forward once more, a monster’s foot came into view, crushing my arm.

“!!!!”

My eyes widened.

I tried to hold back the sounds of pain somehow, but ultimately, the voice that came out was beyond my control.

“Ughhh, ahhhh!”

“So cute.”

The monster held entirely different values from a human.

While we had discussions about whether to abide by the law or break it, the monster acted naturally, questioning why that was the law.

In a situation where someone might unconsciously frown at the sound of another’s suffering, it was bizarre to see the monster smiling.

It felt like I was going to d*e from the pain.

I thought my consciousness might break.

The pitch-black monster had a character that enjoyed this kind of thing.

Of course, the monster liked people’s reactions in general; it didn’t necessarily enjoy only these feelings.

However, the most intense emotions that arose—writhing in pain, screaming at the loss of someone—were simply easier to provoke.

“Who told you about my babies?”

Creak.

The bl**d vessels in my eyes burst.

My right arm was crushed just like a hand.

My arm was forced down, bones broke, and nerves were damaged as it was crushed.

In the intensely burning pain, I screamed once more.

“I’ve never shown humans any of this, not even once.”

My school uniform was stained with bl**d. My flesh turned purple.

Should I be glad? Because I was wearing a school uniform, it was fortunate that my crushed body wasn’t visible.

“Where did you, who told you, ask?”

With a crunch, my right arm became nothing below the elbow.

Whether my head was going numb or I was losing my mind, my sense of pain was becoming dulled.

I was running out of breath. I felt like I was lacking oxygen due to screaming too much.

My vision blurred. Looking at the dark space with cold stone floors, I wondered if it was a cave.

How long had it been since I burned? Now that my right hand had disappeared, I simply felt a great sense of loss.

“…Ugh.”

I bit my teeth.

If I stopped breathing and endured the pain rising to my throat, although my face felt like it might explode, I could momentarily swallow my voice.

Grrr, as a sound came from my mouth, the monster paused and then grinned.

“Think carefully. If you don’t say anything, you might d*e.”

When it grabbed my hair and pulled me up, I trembled.

Then, I opened my mouth slightly.

“…You’re going to k*ll me anyway.”

“Me? Why would I? I tend to keep my promises.”

The nonchalance in its tone while responding to what I thought was a provocation was quite a sight.

I snorted, cutting it off as if to mock its words.

“You? I don’t believe you.”

My arm was already useless.

My left arm was fine, but my hand had morphed oddly.

Anyone would say it looked like someone had tried to roll dough with it, pressing it down.

It would be strange to trust a monster who would go this far.

At the moment I spoke with conviction, the monster’s eyes widened.

I could see the red pupils shaking.

The moment she grabbed my head and threw me, my body flew and crashed against the wall.

“Cough!”

Even if it had just been a hard wall, it would have hurt, but the unevenness of the cave wall felt like it was stabbing into me.

As I rolled on the ground again, the monster’s chilling voice approached.

“How do you know? How can you conclude that? Why would I do that? Don’t you want to live?”

“……Ugh.”

If I were to survive, it was evident that I would have my limbs rendered useless for resisting.

Even though I already knew that, should I really listen to those words?

Whether I spoke or not, I knew the same future awaited me.

With no arms and no legs, I would probably live on, burdened with a disability.

Then I would have to abandon the Academy and live on without being able to find a job until I died.

I wasn’t here just to cling to life for such a miserable existence.

If I was going to d*e anyway, it would be better to d*e before becoming a body that couldn’t even k*ll myself.

It was painful, but the thought that it might be better than living alone in loneliness until starving to d*ath was possible, as I now felt the pain less acutely.

“…Yes, you liar.”

I spoke provocatively like that. My breath was ragged, and my vision was blurry.

And I thought it would be unreasonable to expect to survive in such a situation.

So I wished that it would rather get angry and k*ll me.

Just grab my neck quickly, I urged as if shouting.

Then the monster gritted its teeth and approached me.

Capturing that sight in my eyes, I closed them tightly.

I wanted to do my best, but I couldn’t.

What I regretted the most was that I hadn’t thought to create any evidence in the end, thus breaking Yoon Hamin’s trust at last.

Because I had prevented the collapse of the Barrier, the monster was coming to find me, but I didn’t regret that.

It was the best I could do when I didn’t expect things to turn out like this.

Still, I had a small regret that maybe I should have at least followed the route where the protagonist could have been happy.

“…Come to think of it, it’s strange. I’m making conclusions that it’s a lie…”

As I gathered my thoughts, preparing to accept d*ath, a monster stood in front of me, deep in thought.

In that moment, I felt an alarm ringing in my head.

I couldn’t let the monster think any longer.

“Ugh, ah!”

A voice that broke apart.

Desperately, I channeled my magical power.

Please.

I fervently wished as I pointed my crushed left hand toward the monster.

The sound of crackling filled my ears. I thought maybe it would reach at

this distance, but the monster grabbed my arm as if it were annoying and twisted it with a crack.

“Ahhh! Ahhhhhh!”

My elbow turned in the wrong direction.

Seeing my arm twisted grotesquely, I screamed until my throat felt like it was going to burst.

Why is it that when people are in pain, they want to scream like this?

Is it because if they don’t, they might lose their minds in anguish?

My left arm hurt too much, and my right arm had already been shattered, so there was no right arm to wrap around my left arm.

In so much pain, I buried my face into the floor and shouted.

“Ahhhhhh!”

In the midst of that, the monster continued its line of thought calmly.

Its mutterings made me even more anxious.

“How did you find the feathers? Who told you? It can’t be that another one told you.”

Don’t do it.

“It’s so strange. Moreover, you were brought here with monsters that you’ve never shown to humans, and yet you know how to deal with it.”

Don’t do it.

“Ugh… Hnnng.”

It felt like bubbles were forming in my mouth.

Drool flowed out from my open mouth, soaking the floor.

In the fiery pain that felt like my head was burning, I soon found myself begging.

Forgetting that the other was a monster, I cautiously prayed.

“Please, please… k*ll me, please…”

To that voice, the monster responded simply.

“Why would I?”

Why, you ask? If I’m going to be an obstacle, isn’t it you who wouldn’t hesitate to k*ll me?

Please.

“This is the first time I’ve enjoyed myself so much.”

…Ah.

What have I done wrong again?

Should I have not begged? No, was it already too late back then?

Was it wrong from the start?

Ch. 24 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 24

“Hmph, heuh, hmhm.”

A cheerful hum passed by my ears. With vacant eyes, I followed its owner, who, smiling widely for some reason, was placing a rope in front of me.

Can I say I’m glad I didn’t d*e? No, the thought of what might happen to me here only brought forth anxiety.

My legs were fine, but I didn’t run away.

It wasn’t that I lacked strength, but if I ran away, I felt like I would end up breaking my legs too, so I couldn’t even choose to escape towards the light.

In any case, it was clear that the collapsed barrier would be restored under the leadership of the Lamiris family, and considering that this wasn’t within the barrier, there was really nowhere for me to go.

I wasn’t particularly hoping to play tag with a monster out there with no people around.

Thinking about how I must have traversed this street alone while everyone else was distracted, even if I counted to ten and ran, I would clearly be caught at the entrance of that cave.

The constant, repeating pain felt somewhat bearable as my body seemed to adapt to it, but as I started to calm down, I groaned at the throbbing sensation.

Both my hands were crushed. My hands, which I had forgotten had bones, hung limply. Moreover, my left arm was bent outward, in a direction it shouldn’t be bent, and my right arm was completely useless.

“…Heugh.”

I began to worry if I could be treated.

Honestly, the story centers on Yoon Hamin, so I had never heard anyone get hurt this badly. Normally, characters faced trials typical of munchkin characters, and it was exceedingly rare for someone to be described as getting this messed up, unless it was truly the last scene.

No, more than worrying about that, I had to first worry about whether I could survive and return safely from this situation. If that wasn’t possible, I would need to find a way to d*e as painlessly as possible.

“Does it hurt? If you had said so honestly, it wouldn’t have been this painful~”

Her playful tone felt like that of a child chattering innocently.

The dissonance felt from this monster doing such a thing so casually was a form of rejection that any human would inevitably feel.

Besides, I wasn’t unaware that those words were nonsense. She likely knew that as well.

The statement that she would spare me if I shared what I knew was an empty promise, but now that I saw through it, was she taking an interest in me? The monster continued to nervously gather something in front of me.

First, it was the rope; the second was a monster.

The monster, screeching, sounded somewhat like a bird, but seeing a creature the size of a person bouncing toward me was a bit frightening.

“Don’t be too scared. I don’t plan to k*ll you.”

That’s even scarier.

I looked at the beast with red eyes watching me from above while sitting against the wall. Its beak and claws were sharp enough to be called a bird of prey.

Even a regular eagle is quite large and would seem scary if it were to peck at something; this monster seemed like it would peck at a human heart. And that assumption wasn’t far off, as the corner of the monster’s mouth lifted.

“You can eat.”

With those words, its beak turned toward me. I turned my head sharply, wondering if it meant to peck out my eyeball, but its beak seemed to misfire and struck beside me instead.

Crack.

“Ahhh! Aaaaah!”

I thrashed around. I realized that it hadn’t missed, but had aimed for my shoulder from the start, and I tried to escape.

But the monster tilted its head, as if indicating it wasn’t going to let me escape, and dug right into my shoulder. Like a woodpecker, it relentlessly pecked at my shoulder, pressing it against the wall, causing tears to flow uncontrollably.

In the midst of all my struggles and screams, it felt truly sorrowful to know there was no one to help me.

“Aaaaah!”

“Stay still.”

How? How on earth?

bl**d burst forth. Perhaps the monster found the taste of that bl**d good, as it continued to devour my arm.

Even if it was now useless, this was too much. It hurts, it hurts, stop it.

From the pain, my body naturally fell down. While lying down and struggling, my arm had already been pecked away a few times and was now gone. I felt my body grow cold as bl**d poured out.

Was it this sorrowful to have no hands to grasp while bl**d was flowing? It was one thing to lose something; it was another to be devoured and turned into a mess.

Experiencing all of this was entirely different from just thinking about how much it would hurt.

My vision was tinged with yellow.

“…Hoo, khak!”

My right arm was gone. I rolled on the floor in agony.

The monster, watching with a look of disgust, sighed and stepped on me to fix me in place so that I couldn’t move.

“Ugh…”

As I groaned, the monster sighed heavily.

“The human body is too weak. That’s why it’s nice. It breaks so easily. But it’s a little disappointing when a human I don’t want to break easily breaks quickly.”

Sharp teeth revealed themselves with a sinister grin. I trembled at the sight of those red eyes in the dark cave.

Snap.

At that moment, it felt like something was digging into my body.

“Cough, cough, hack!”

“You’ve encountered me once before.”

Upon hearing that, what flickered through my mind was none other than the existence of purple feathers. Realizing that the flow of magical power was somewhat similar, I trembled.

Even though I knew it and had encountered it, I couldn’t equate the flow of magical power crawling through my body with a totem that only output energy from the outside.

“Hoo, ah, aaaaah!”

Scritch, scritch, scritch.

The unpleasant crunching sound that seemed to dig into my flesh passed by my ears.

I wanted to thrash about. But since my belly was stomped on, trying to move only caused more pain in my abdomen, so it was better not to move.

As I listened to that unpleasant sound multiple times, my fading consciousness suddenly came to a complete stop. The bl**d that had been gushing out had stopped.

“…Ah.”

I gasped, taking heavy breaths. There was a primal joy in realizing I was still alive, but simultaneously, a rational fear arose at the thought of them trying to cut off my limbs.

The bird, stained with my bl**d, pulled my arm from the torn part of my uniform and, after putting it in its mouth a few times, swallowed it down.

As I dumbly watched, in a state of despair, I lowered my hollow eyes.

What good did it do to keep watching that?

Where my arm had been just a moment ago, only the sleeve of my blazer hung on, looking forlorn. I felt a sense of emptiness.

To some extent, the bleeding had stopped, and the pain had eased enough to catch my breath. The cold sweat drenching my body felt thick.

Now, only one arm, twisted at an odd angle, remained.

The monster did not immediately charge at me. It just waited for the monster's command.

As I exhaled breath of various colors, looking at the monster with sunken eyes, she removed her foot from my belly and came closer.

"It's a bit interesting. But really, are you not going to speak? This time I will truly let you live."

"……"

Thoroughly exhausted, I couldn't properly assess the situation.

Honestly, even if I could assess the situation properly, it would be hard to gauge what those words meant.

It might just be a trial balloon again, or she might genuinely have a change of heart.

But when you can't tell what is true and what is the right answer, it seems best to quietly push forward with the option I initially chose.

"Mo- La…"

As I spoke those dying words, the monster hummed and nodded her head.

"Hmm, okay? I see. It has to be at least up to that point to hinder me. But it's strange."

The monster lightly grabbed my chin, lifting my head.

"…It's a bit surprising that someone who seems like they can't do anything knows something."

Hearing that made me almost snap. It wasn’t an incorrect statement, nor was there any reason to get angry; I just didn’t understand why it irritated me.

My ability as an Awakened One was also subpar; if you asked if I had good strength, that wasn’t the case either, and I was busy securing my place at the bottom.

With a fierce grip, she covered my mouth, as if about to crush my chin. It felt like my jaw would dislocate.

“I like that. When someone who can’t do anything struggles.”

The way she smiled with that laughter and those eyes narrowed even more frighteningly.

“The look of despair in the eyes of someone who realizes late that they are incompetent is extremely thrilling…!!”

I thought about how she was a monster that thrived on the intense emotions and reactions of people.

Even with her chilling voice, I could do nothing but widen my eyes. As she said, I was incompetent, but I still wanted to try to do something.

And that brought about this result.

“Eat.”

With those words, my left arm, properly immobilized now, shared the same fate as my right arm.

“Eat.”

“Eat.”

With those three commands, I lay on the cold cave floor, leaving not a single limb behind.

Having screamed too much, my throat was raw, and having cried too much, my tears had dried. My dried tear marks itched, and I wanted to scratch them, but even that was not possible in my current reality.

The monster looked at me and chuckled.

“How’s that? Feel good? I feel great.”

I did not feel good. The fact that I couldn’t even walk on my own feet was simply too shocking.

Ch. 25 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 25

The attack of the monsters ended, and everything was organized.

But I couldn’t be entirely happy in that situation.

Too many casualties had occurred.

No one could have properly prepared for the monsters that broke through the barrier at an unexpected time, shattering expectations and prejudices when everyone had let their guard down.

Yoon Hamin, who faced this reality directly, looked around blankly.

Although still a first-year student, the thought of becoming a hero in the future made this encounter feel hellish.

I had always dreamed of being a shining hero who throws away his life for others while saving himself, but facing those who I could no longer save made me wonder what else could be considered hell.

And after confronting this situation, the words of Kanna Aurora came to mind.

The voice that spoke of breaking the barrier and monsters coming in, a pathological kind of obsession.

No one thought like that, but she spoke as if she had seen the future, her voice full of certainty.

I wondered if perhaps, just perhaps, if I had truly believed those words and spread the warning somehow, maybe something could have been done.

That thought lingered in my mind until I shook my head to make it disappear.

There was no need to think about other things.

At that time, the information was certainly not trustworthy enough.

There was no evidence, and the timing she spoke of was off.

But even as I tried to dismiss it, the thought that brushed by my mind gripped me firmly.

There may not have been evidence, but since I had disregarded it, it probably wouldn’t have happened.

And true to her words, that day was quiet.

If she had indeed turned back time, I wondered if it was my fault for not believing her.

In reality, it wasn’t, so there wasn’t really any guilt to feel, but facing the harsh truth that someone had to d*e and someone had to lose their family led to a lingering regret of “what if.”

If I had said even one word, or if I had expressed my anxiety and suggested checking the barrier, would it have made a difference? That “what if” kept circling in my mind.

“…It’s hell.”

Yoon Hamin murmured.

Then, the hero he met due to this situation, Rain, responded.

“If you call this hell, you won’t survive the next one. It’s certainly sad that people died, but if you’re stuck on that and can’t save others, then that’s true hell.”

“Right… It’s truly hell to know and yet not be able to protect.”

Yoon Hamin agreed with that statement.

Rain assumed he had just agreed with her words, but Yoon Hamin had already experienced that hellish feeling, which is why he responded that way.

For Yoon Hamin, Kanna’s information was too uncertain. There were no sources and no evidence.

It was just an irresponsible prediction anyone could worry about, saying that it would eventually happen.

So he had dismissed it outright, but facing the scene now made him think maybe it would have been worth believing just once.

“Now that it’s all over, and we need to repair the barrier, the little ones should go back.”

“Yes, I will return.”

It felt bleak.

Even knowing that it was the best option, even knowing he would have reacted the same way in the past, a restless heart remained, leaving him dizzy.

Yoon Hamin looked at the scenery as he returned to the Academy.

As he moved away from the collapsed exterior walls and took in the intact interior, he opened his eyes wide upon reaching the destination, the Academy.

“…What’s going on?”

As soon as he returned, the thought of looking for Kanna terrified him, as the Academy seemed to be in disarray from a separate attack.

Upon entering, he could already see parts that had collapsed, and other heroes were busy handling the corpse of a monster.

He thought this place would at least be safe, but apparently that was not the case, leading to such a situation.

As he frowned at something feeling off, he saw Teacher Lucia running around in a panic.

“Everyone, gather and count off! We’ll check attendance once and then go home!!”

The teacher shouted like that.

“Teacher?”

“Oh, Yoon Hamin!”

“What on earth happened here?”

“Oh, the monster appeared suddenly, and our response was delayed… No, it was quick, actually. Anyway, the suppression is done, so it’s safe, but there are still some students who’ve run off in different directions and are missing…? Even sending a message through a device gets no response; it drives me crazy.”

The teacher sighed heavily, looking around.

“Who do we need to find?”

“…Well, Kanna and….”

Upon hearing that, Yoon Hamin immediately took out his device from his pocket.

He searched for a saved number and made the call.

“Teacher, I’ll look for Kanna Aurora. I have a personal connection with her.”

“R-really?”

The homeroom teacher said that and moved to go somewhere else.

It was to seek help from other students.

As Yoon Hamin listened to the ringback tone, he quickly ran through the building’s interior.

He still hadn’t organized his thoughts about asking Kanna various questions upon returning, but the thought of not receiving any contact put him in an uneasy mood.

How had he considered the instability of the barrier? How had he thought that a monster would break through it?

Was the overlap of timing just a coincidence?

As Yoon Hamin bit down hard and dashed around, he suddenly heard a ringing sound from a somewhat deserted area.

“…!”

Startled by the sound, Yoon Hamin ran over to find the source.

Before long, he came across a device lying on the ground.

Yoon Hamin, in a daze, picked it up and narrowed his eyes at the three letters on the screen.

‘Yoon Hamin’

As the call ended, another device that abruptly cut off came into view, and he realized this was Kanna’s device.

He remained silent for a while.

Just fiddling with the device, he let out a half-hearted laugh before lowering his head deeply.

“…Where did she go, leaving this behind?”

He murmured, but in this deserted space, no one answered, making it feel lonely.

Before long, worries emerged that maybe she had been dragged away by someone from here.

His heart grew increasingly uneasy.

*

“Ugh…”

The ropes wrapped around my body once, and then around my neck.

With each tug, my chest tightened, and my neck felt constricted.

I felt tears welling up as if my chest would tear apart.

I wanted to scream, asking why this was happening. Yet, thinking that at least having this burden on my neck made it less constrictive felt strangely like a relief.

Strapped onto the back of a horse-like monster, it was trotting along while humming a tune.

With a human body, I couldn’t endure the magical power outside the barrier, and it became increasingly difficult to breathe.

My breath trembled. It felt like this was what slowly dying was like.

The sensation of being consumed was so agonizing that merely breathing became a challenge.

“Ah, is it hard?”

“…Huh, huh.”

With my waist bent over and placed on the beast’s back, all I could do was exhale hastily.

The monster, perhaps worried about my condition, infused magical power into my body.

Clip, clip.

The sound that tickled my ears made me thrash about.

But the ropes binding my body prevented any vigorous movement.

I jerked slightly, but the monster paid no attention and continued to trot.

Clip-clop, clip-clop. With each step, the jolting vibrations traveled through my abdomen.

As I groaned, the rustling noise penetrated my ears and tormented me.

The monster just smiled as it patted my head.

“Want to see what humans do?”

I understood what it was trying to say.

“Humans are truly ugly beings. They wash away their sins by calling someone a witch or a monster, and they feel fulfilled by driving one away.”

As the hoofbeats concluded, I turned my head towards where the horse was looking.

“Look at that. The remains of humans who were chased away because they were called monsters. Do you know? I’m one of them.”

“…….”

“You don’t seem surprised by anything. I guess there’s no fun in teasing you. Still, I like that you’re trying to resist.”

No matter what it said, I couldn’t be shocked.

There was no need to receive information in order, as later information would just be the same as what was mentioned now, and I didn’t need to take it too seriously.

“Then should I send you back…”

“Shut up.”

I mumbled softly.

“Why? You think I’m lying until the end?”

I didn’t respond to the monster’s words.

But the monster, perhaps angered by being treated as a liar, lifted me in the air and threw me off its back.

My body was easily thrown and soon hit a stone.

Crash—it sounded like something broke.

As I stood there in a daze, the taste of bl**d lingered in my mouth.

As I opened my tightly closed eyes, I trembled at the sight of human remains scattered beside me.

No matter what, encountering someone’s bones wasn’t a pleasant experience.

But I had no strength to escape from here.

I felt like my head was about to explode from the pain.

After dismounting from the beast, the monster quietly spoke.

“Do I look like a liar?”

I couldn’t say anything.

My mind was too foggy to grasp what to do.

Even in that state, what I wanted to say was clear.

In this condition, dying would be better,

Since it was obvious I would live as a disabled person unable to do anything and d*e of starvation in a place no one knew, I wondered if there was any reason to return in this state.

The monster made a distorted expression towards me.

Ch. 26 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 26

The novel was structured in a way that was inevitably biased. In the first-person perspective, one could not read the emotions of others, and even in the third person, the events surrounding the protagonist were the focus, so it was not possible to know everything about that worldview.

However, the funny thing was that information about the hostile monster towards the protagonist came out somewhat, so I could understand a good deal, even if not everything.

I thought I wouldn’t care about monsters and wished they would just disappear. Yet, when the story turned into a bad ending, I couldn’t help but think about the monster.

So, I found myself pondering multiple times what its purpose was and why it was doing such things; to me, a monster was no longer an unknown entity.

But the problem was, what would knowing that accomplish?

Most of the methods I thought of were things I’d ponder if I were the protagonist. If I were Yoon Hamin, I would have acted this way, but as it stands, I couldn’t change my current situation.

I was powerless and incompetent, simply enduring this suffering.

“…Ugh.”

The monster seemed annoyed and gritted its teeth.

Just a moment ago, it was giggling with interest in me, but now it was angry that I refused to believe its words.

Was it genuinely angry that I didn’t listen to its sincere words this time?

If that were the case, it wouldn’t be much different from a shepherd boy who lied twice and got angry when no one listened to him the third time when he spoke the truth. Who would listen?

“Do I look like I’m lying all the time?!”

“Ugh, ngh…”

With a sudden kick to my belly, it felt as if I’d been hit by a car in that moment.

A quick, twisting sensation in my insides. I felt I might throw up, and the pain that tightened my body enveloped me.

Saliva dripped from my mouth, but there was no time to clean it up. Just regaining my dazed senses was enough of a task.

“How can I make you like me more? How can I make you despair more? It seems like killing you would be what I desire…”

The monster was taking great care to elicit a deeper reaction and change of emotion, even concerned about just me.

Whether to call this impressive or insane was unclear, but suddenly, its hand entered my mouth.

In that instant, I wanted to bite down, but without a care, it pulled out a tooth right there.

I was shocked at how easily it came out, and the nerves that were still attached caused me pain.

“Ugh!? Ugh! Ugh!”

The only thing I could do was flail with my wings. It was a pathetic sight, crawling on the ground like a maggot, and it posed no threat to her.

My lower teeth had been pulled out.

bl**d began to flow profusely and filled my mouth.

“Ah! Ah…”

Yet her hand still wouldn’t withdraw, so I had to plead desperately. Despite it being pulled out, the pain was so severe that tears streamed from my eyes.

The throbbing continued, but the monster punched my face regardless.

“Shut up.”

The playful expression and tone it had before were gone, replaced by a sharp voice along with its fist.

It felt as if my nose was broken. I felt distorted. In that moment, I felt a sharp pain that made it hard to breathe. bl**d streamed from my nose into my mouth.

“Ugh, ugh.”

“I’ll let you go. But if you interfere with me again when you return, you will experience something much worse than this. I remember your face, your eyes. If you disturb me like this again, you will feel an even stronger emotion than this.”

Crack, a tooth was pulled out.

I realized for the first time how static a human body could be without arms and legs. No matter how much I thrashed with my head and torso, I could only wriggle on the floor.

The teeth being pulled while crushing my gums caused me sharp pain.

How am I supposed to live?

I wanted to shout, asking why it hurt people like this and then let them go. I felt a desire to question it. But since it was a monster, I thought the answer would be just as monstrous, making me exceedingly frustrated.

“Please, don’t do that anymore… please…”

With two teeth already pulled, I was even slurring my speech due to the pain.

In any case, I only had one chance given to me. Stopping some incident was now ended with this. So, I vowed that I would never again go against the monster’s mood.

So I prayed.

I was about to beg her not to do such things of pulling teeth anymore. Then the monster moaned, “Hmmm,” and raised the corners of its lips.

“Hmmm, I like your obedience. But it seems your eyes aren’t completely dead yet.”

The moment I heard those words, my eyes widened.

One, two, three… I realized that I had twenty-eight teeth and began to cry.

I would rather d*e; why did this keep happening? It was so distressing that I felt like I was going crazy.

“Ugh, ah…”

Since all my teeth were gone, I felt as if the structure of my jaw was slightly twisted.

“Hehe, hehehehe, cute. Like a doll. I could hug you to sleep. Of course, feeding you and dealing with your waste would be tedious, but…”

She caressed my body repeatedly, showing signs of losing interest, lifted my body to observe and laugh, and then just dropped me to the ground.

Thud, I fell to the floor and closed my eyes in pain.

“Ugh!”

Groaning, I buried my face in the ground, and I felt the sensation of a foot stomping on my head.

“How much should I cut off next time?”

Horrified by those words, I broke out in a cold sweat. What more could they possibly want to cut off? Fear overtook me.

Were they planning to take out my insides while I was still alive?

“It won’t hurt.”

“Ah, hiya…”

With all my teeth gone, my words all came out slurred, and I couldn’t speak properly.

“Aah, aaah! Ughhhh!”

*

A day later, even the students who hadn’t contacted me managed to get a hold of their parents. There were several reasons, like saying their device broke while they were running away.

As the number of students was slowly filling up, one remained missing.

“…Kanna?”

I reflexively turned my head. But as expected, if she wasn’t there, she just wasn’t there.

Even though there had been an invasion from monsters, recovery usually happened quickly, and if no one was injured, they should have returned quickly, but Kanna was different.

She hadn’t gone out for hero practice; she was simply hiding within the academy.

Only Kanna was missing.

Rumors surfaced that perhaps she had run away after always being last place. There were inklings of pessimistic choices being made.

Although Meritocracy promises some degree of treatment once one becomes a hero, there were voices scoffing, questioning whether the burden of those choices was too much for her to bear.

In such a pyramid-like structure, being last simply made one prey.

The thought of this being too overtly apparent made me frown.

“…Even so, this is too much.”

I muttered this, but I knew that I had nothing to say myself.

I had thought of her as someone unrelated to me, not even being concerned because I had assumed she would take care of herself, so I found myself awkwardly in the position of an observer.

The perpetrator and the bystander. To Kanna, I must have seemed like similar sc*m, and thus I had nothing to say.

However, once I started to care, I couldn’t stop, and I just grew anxious.

I worried that perhaps Kanna had actually died.

Since it was Wednesday, the exams continued.

After finishing the exam and receiving my report card, I quickly left the academy.

“Yoon Hamin! Where are you going in such a hurry?”

Orca followed behind and asked.

I hesitated at her question.

“…I can’t find Kanna…”

“Do you know where she went…?”

“No, I don’t.”

A sigh escaped me involuntarily.

Without any clues, I was in a rush, not even knowing what I was looking for.

Orca glanced around briefly before finally settling her gaze on me.

“…If you want to find someone, I could gather some of my family’s people.”

“…….”

I was intrigued by Orca’s suggestion.

Did it need to go that far? I thought, but I also felt like I wouldn’t be able to find her otherwise, so I moaned in acceptance.

“Then, will you do it?”

“Alright.”

Orca said that, and then contacted someone through her device.

I watched her for a moment and turned my head from side to side.

She couldn’t have been trampled by a monster. Furthermore, she wouldn’t have been eaten either.

Yet, I couldn’t help but worry about where she had gone.

There were things I wanted to say and things I wanted to ask.

I began to envision the worst-case scenario, wondering if she had truly made a pessimistic choice seeing her own life.

But thinking about such things only made me feel ominous, and I shook my head at that notion.

“For now, I’ll start looking from here.”

“…Ah, alright. Since I made contact, it won’t be long before we find her.”

At Orca’s words, I nodded and headed toward the bus stop.

First, I went to the site where the monster was said to have appeared.

Naturally, I couldn’t find Kanna there.

I looked around, assuming she might have been taken by the monster or the monster, and yet I couldn’t shake the feeling that I was simply wandering aimlessly, unsure if that was correct.

“Kanna… where could you have gone?”

Everyone was present in the class, yet she vanished alone, leaving her device behind with no contact.

I found myself questioning the significance of searching like this.

It felt as though Kanna was some totem and I was wandering around trying to find it.

It made no sense to look for barriers when I wasn’t even searching for a totem.

So what had the result been?

Since Kanna herself said she would take care of it, I didn’t believe it.

I absentmindedly lifted my head.

Like looking for a totem, could I just find it?

Without even knowing whether it exists or not?

How long would it take? A day, two days, three days, four days, five days.

Did I have to spend that much time?

“It’s frustrating.”

I didn’t want to chase after something uncertain.

But the more I thought I had to find it, the more I wished for its existence despite the uncertainty.

Previously, Kanna had been beside me, so it was easy to just go along, but now for some reason, I felt lonely and bitter.

A day passed. Two days passed.

Time passed, meaninglessly, until four days had gone by.

I tried to search all Sunday, but thought I had made no progress when I felt a sense of familiarity in my surroundings.

When I raised my head and looked around, I remembered Kanna pointing to this place, mentioning that there was a totem here.

A small smile formed on my lips.

Here you are, telling me I won, yet I came to doubt you in the end; I felt a bit ugly about myself.

As I smiled bitterly, trying to call myself a nasty person, a figure caught my eye.

It was a person staggering as they walked.

Was this how Kanna felt while looking for the totem?

If it truly existed, it would have felt like this.

“…Kanna!”

Her vacant eyes turned towards me.

Her staggering steps collapsed, and her body fell to the ground.

I rushed toward her and embraced her.

“Kanna…!”

She looked at me without a word and then closed her eyes.

Ch. 27 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 27

There is pain that a person can endure and pain that a person cannot endure, and what I experienced was something I couldn’t handle.

I thought I would rather just d*e like that, but I held on too long, and that became the problem. Just being alive can be considered a blessing, but I wasn’t so sure about that.

I had questions about my limbs that had been reattached by the monster; I didn’t even know if my teeth were in proper condition or how they had been reattached. Since it wasn’t something I knew about, all I was left with was worry.

The moment my mind cleared, my body trembled.

Thinking back on the time spent with the monster, my teeth chattered. My limbs ached. My gums felt numb. Even though I had everything returned to me now and was fine, my body still screamed in agony.

“Ah, ahhh!”

It shouldn’t be hurting anymore, but there were no bird-like beaks gnawing at my limbs, no fingers pulling out my teeth, yet I couldn’t understand why I was still in so much pain. I simply trembled in fear.

Then someone grabbed me from the side.

“Kanna…! Are you okay?!”

I panicked and had a seizure at the sound of that voice. The fear that wondered if someone was next to me might still be the monster lingered in my mind.

“Eek!”

“It’s me, Yoon Hamin… This is my house…”

Though I was scared, that feeling didn’t last long. In my line of sight, Yoon Hamin, dressed in his school uniform, was looking at me.

Seeing his golden eyes fixed on me made me realize it was a different gaze than that of the monster, allowing me to calm down a bit.

“…Huh, huh, why? Why am I… in your house…?”

I tried to catch my breath while looking around.

I couldn’t remember how I ended up here, which made me feel heightened emotions.

The fact that my location would change without me knowing whenever I lost consciousness felt terrifying.

Yoon Hamin hesitated before responding to my words, then opened his mouth.

“I found you wandering near the barrier, but since you collapsed, I didn’t know where else to take you, so I brought you home.”

Hearing that, I lowered my head and looked at my arms. I had no shirt, and even the blazer of my academy uniform was hanging loose, stained with bl**d around the shoulders.

Though my arms had returned to normal, they hadn’t been washed, so the white blazer was inevitably stained.

“……”

I glanced at it momentarily, sighed, and tried to get out of bed. But Yoon Hamin stopped me.

“Whoa, where are you trying to go?”

“Home. Why?”

“No, how do you expect to go home in that condition? Plus, it’s already late.”

After hearing that, I turned my head abruptly. Looking towards the window that every room must have, the night sky filled with stars welcomed me on the other side.

“…Did you say five days have passed?”

“Yeah.”

“What day is it today?”

“Sunday.”

At that, my body jolted.

Having been dragged to a place with no clock and continuously beaten, torn, cut, and pulled for an unknown duration, I felt as if my sense of time had vanished. I had been lost in thought, and cautiously opened my mouth.

“…I’m sorry, but do you have any sewing supplies? What is it called…?”

“A sewing kit?”

“Ah, yeah. That. Can I borrow it?”

“I have one. I’ll lend it to you.”

Yoon Hamin said that and brought a sewing kit from a drawer outside the room, handing it to me. I quietly looked at the thread and needle, then

opened the box and pulled out the white thread.

“Thank you.”

Saying that, I carefully took off the part of the blazer sleeve so it wouldn’t fall off. I had long lost the dress shirt I was wearing underneath, so it was a bit disappointing that it had turned into a sleeveless shirt. There’s no way to turn back what’s gone.

But at least if I wore the blazer, no one would know whether the inside was sleeveless or not, so it didn’t seem to matter much.

As I carefully sewed up the fraying sleeve, Yoon Hamin sat quietly on the bed and stared at me.

“…Why?”

His intense gaze made me lift my head slightly to look up at him, and his shoulders flinched.

“I was just wondering how this happened.”

At his question, I hesitated for a moment.

I had many thoughts coming to mind, but they were all things I hesitated to say.

I worried about what would happen if I said the monster reattached my limbs after severing them.

There was no story anywhere saying that the monster had let someone go, so if I were a character, I probably wouldn’t believe it.

This time, there were truly no pieces of evidence, so I had no way to convince him.

Without evidence, no matter how much I might trust someone, I realized this time that a part of me would still doubt deep down.

So ultimately, I kept my mouth shut.

“…I don’t know.”

I’m grateful for the help, but I couldn’t share that much. I didn’t want to create more misunderstandings here.

It wasn’t that I resented anyone or vented my anger just because they didn’t believe me. I just didn’t want to stir suspicion on something that lacked evidence.

If I said the monster had severed my limbs multiple times and pulled out several of my teeth only to claim I was fully healed, who would believe that?

Knowing they wouldn’t believe it made it easy to let go of the hope that someone would believe me.

Though a little clumsy, I wasn’t completely unskilled and managed to stitch it up neatly. After sewing as carefully as I could, it was looking decent.

While I was stitching up the other side, Yoon Hamin asked another question.

“I want to ask why there was so much bl**d.”

“…Just, you know, it just happened.”

It had become a conversation I couldn’t quite say, so I found myself unable to talk about even these trivial matters.

As I waved off his words, the atmosphere in the room turned cold. I finished sewing and closed the box tightly. The sound of it snapping shut seemed to awaken Yoon Hamin from his daze, but it didn’t matter to me.

I had nothing more I could do now, nor did I feel like doing anything.

“Thanks for lending it to me. I’m leaving now.”

I put on the blazer and got up from the bed. Yoon Hamin seemed like he wanted to say something, but not wanting to feel pain any longer, I left the house without looking back.

It was too dark at night, so the bus stop didn’t seem to be moving. Although it was a bit far, it didn’t seem to be too far from my home, so I hurried my steps.

*

“…d*mn it.”

I squatted down in the narrow bathroom, scrubbing my blazer against the washboard. I was trying to wipe away the bl**d that had stained it around the shoulders.

Having slept well at Yoon Hamin’s place already, my mind was clear, and at this moment, it was time to wash the blazer.

Honestly, I wondered when it would dry and when I would wear it if I soaked it like this, but I had no choice. I could try to blow-dry it in the morning, and if that didn’t work, I’d just have to rest another day.

A sigh escaped me, but I had no other uniform except this one, so there was nothing I could do.

The dress shirt had been deliciously consumed by the new monster along with my arms, leaving it as a sleeveless garment. I seemed to be running low on money to buy a new shirt, so I needed to cover it up with the blazer, but the blazer was stained with bl**d, which was quite a headache.

Of course, I also had to wash the dress shirt, which made things harder.

“If I’m going to do this, maybe I should just take it to the dry cleaner and take a break for two days…”

Sweat beaded on my forehead. I was genuinely too exhausted, and a rough breath escaped me.

The exam scheduled for the day after the incident was already ruined, and having skipped Thursday and Friday, I felt certain that my fifth exam would be ruined too. So a deep-seated desire to give up and just let it all go formed within me.

If that's how it was, I shouldn't have even encountered Yoon Hamin.

With my wet hands, I covered my face. I wiped it off slowly.

"……"

I'm scared.

The thought that if I did something to irritate the monster again, I would face even more pain made every pore in my body feel expanded. A chill of cold sweat prickled at me.

My fingers crumpled and crushed. It wasn't about my arms being cut off; it was like being torn apart by a bird's beak. And then there was a hand pulling out one tooth after another.

Every time I thought of that, even though I was fine now, I felt like I could feel the pain.

Was this a hallucination? It made me dizzy.

Feeling the heat in my fingertips, I reflexively turned on the cold water and frantically washed my hands as if I had an obsession.

"…Ha, huff…"

I swallowed my saliva, but the fear that wouldn't leave made my body shrink unconsciously.

In reality, there was nothing left to be afraid of. There was clearly no reason or way to provoke the monster anymore.

Since the monster might change its mind about where to place the totem, I couldn't preemptively go and remove it. It would be difficult to find

strategies if a new monster was released.

Even if something I already knew was released, if I kept trying to hold it down again, I would be subjected to this again, and that thought felt terrifying.

As I did the laundry like that, out of fear, I washed my hands obsessively, again and again, unable to wash away the fear caused by the pain.

I curled up in the corner of the bathroom.

“…I don’t want this.”

I feel so powerless.

I have no strength, and I don’t know anything anymore. If I try to move, the monster will…

Ch. 28 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 28

Monday was a day that no one welcomed. Even if one tried to start the new week energetically, the pressure of having to do something felt unbearably heavy.

It was no different for me; I was equally drained.

Was it because of what happened yesterday?

“Yoon Hamin.”

“Yes.”

I responded to the teacher’s voice calling the roll and quickly turned my head. Even during the roll call, the seat of the person who disrupted my mood remained empty.

“Kanna? Kanna? She hasn’t come again today?”

“Yes, she hasn’t.”

The person sitting next to Kanna pointed to the empty seat and answered that way. The teacher looked worried, but knowing it wouldn’t be good to let it affect the class, she quickly moved on to call another student.

During the brief homeroom period, I hesitated about whether to say something, but in the end, I didn’t open my mouth.

After all, the Kanna I met last night was not normal.

My brows furrowed.

The blazer stained with bl**d, the shirt that seemed to have been torn into a sleeveless shape, and overall it was dirty, as if she had rolled around somewhere. Despite that, the lack of visible injuries suggested that if I wanted to know the truth, I would have to ask her.

But the responses I received were apathetic and vague. It was as if she didn’t want to reveal anything to me.

Was that a sign of resentment directed at me?

Was it because before she left, I spoke with a nuance of disbelief, leading her to react that way? Or perhaps, knowing that once again there would be no evidence, she chose to remain silent.

Whether it was the former or the latter, it seemed difficult to change Kanna’s heart.

Even if I said I believed her now, it might appear more courageous to ask her to trust me again, considering that I had previously said I couldn’t trust her without evidence.

“……”

The bell rang, and class began. Even as several bells rang, Kanna did not seem to think of coming in.

I was worried about what might be happening again, but at this moment, I had no means to seek her out. I didn’t know where she lived, and her device was also in my hand.

I just had to keep mulling it over again and again.

What was Kanna seeing, what had she experienced, and what had she done? Something must have happened during the time she was missing, but not knowing that left only frustration inside me.

It felt like a knot that couldn’t be unraveled.

Just as I was feeling that frustration, during the break, I saw another grade teacher rush over to Lucia. And what that teacher said raised my anxiety sharply.

“Is there a student with ivory-colored hair in your class? With purple eyes…?”

“Oh, yes. Are you talking about Kanna Aurora?”

“So her name is Kanna Aurora?”

“Yes, but may I ask what this is about? Kanna hasn’t been coming for a few days, so I haven’t been able to see her.”

“Is that so? No, it’s just that—”

Hearing that made my nose tingle. It must have been due to my emotions fluctuating.

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April had just begun. The scholarship should have come in, but the problem was that I had no device to check that money.

“…I’m screwed.”

I sat holed up in my room, moistening my parched lips with my tongue. I had washed up, but the bloodstains on my uniform still hadn’t come out well.

I worried that washing it too vigorously might ruin the fabric of the uniform.

Stuck between a rock and a hard place, the bloodstains remained, and the blazer, soaked in water, hung pitifully on the drying rack like it was crying tears of despair.

I considered using a hairdryer to dry it quickly, but ultimately I decided against it since I couldn’t afford the electricity bill and would only do so if it became absolutely necessary, leaving everything to the sunlight.

Sitting quietly on my bedding, I stared at it.

I never realized that being without a device could be this critical. It seemed I must have dropped it somewhere while being dragged by the monster, but there was no way I would remember where in such a chaotic situation.

Even trying to go to the laundry would be a problem, and without my uniform, going to the academy felt a bit awkward.

I began to ponder if this was how one could become a school refuser; I found myself thinking that if I didn’t go out for another day, nothing worse could happen.

Speaking of which, it felt like I had left my bag somewhere at the academy, but where on earth was I supposed to find it?

“I’m going crazy.”

After a long time of contemplation, I ended up biting my lip.

I thought there would be no answer, but it turned out that wasn’t entirely true. However, the answer I wished for wasn’t forthcoming.

I put on sweatpants and a hoodie. Worried someone might recognize me, I pulled my hat down low and put on my shoes.

“…Kanna?”

“Hello.”

Coming back after leaving like that yesterday was undoubtedly shameless of me.

I knew that. I wasn’t unaware.

But I couldn’t help it. I just hoped for some understanding.

Even if that was selfish.

“I know it seems very shameless. But can I ask you for one last favor?”

At that small request, Yoon Hamin nodded. It was a moment when I was taken aback, not expecting such a quick response.

“Come in for now. I had something to say too.”

“…Thank you.”

Despite being surprised, I accepted and went inside. I hadn’t realized since I had woken up in a daze and rushed out to sew, but Yoon Hamin’s house seemed quite large.

How could someone who lived alone have such a big house?

It was evident he lived a different life compared to my own, which had been confined to a single room with no living space.

“Do you want something to eat? I was about to have dinner.”

“…I’ll gratefully accept.”

I nodded. Since I had been starving, his offer was very much appreciated.

Sitting across from Yoon Hamin at a table next to the kitchen, I quietly observed the pasta he had made. I knew his cooking skills were outstanding, but I didn’t expect to get to eat it, so I felt a little excited.

Cream pasta. Seeing someone who could make this at home struck me as quite impressive.

As I put it in my mouth, a soft taste along with the rich flavor wafted up to my nose.

And at that moment, tears began to flow from my eyes.

“Kanna?”

With his voice, I snapped back to reality, letting out a soft sigh as I lowered my head. I quickly tried to wipe my tears, but it was too late to hide the fact that I had been caught.

“…Kanna,”

“Yes?”

I answered that while trying to act unfazed and lifted my head.

Yoon Hamin hesitated for a moment as he looked at me, then cautiously continued speaking.

“I was pretty harsh before, wasn’t I?”

“What about?”

“That you couldn’t believe me.”

Ah, that matter.

I hadn’t expected him to remember that I had said such a thing, so my reaction was slightly delayed.

“It’s okay. I thought that could be the case. No, it seems like a natural response…”

As I spoke, I became a little choked up and hastily moved my fork. The white pasta spiraled around the fork and gathered bluntly at its tip.

I put it in my mouth and swallowed alongside the overwhelming emotions.

Yoon Hamin seemed to want a different answer. After keeping his mouth shut, he continued.

“That’s not it. I’m apologizing for not keeping my promise.”

“Promise?”

“The one where I said I’d believe you at least once.”

Hearing that made me stop my chewing.

“To make such a promise and yet be shameless…”

“I don’t understand why I feel guilty when I never even said I would keep that promise.”

Yoon Hamin’s expression hardened.

“Honestly, it is my fault. How can you believe in something when there’s nothing to back it up? Just because I said that doesn’t mean I blame you.”

I continued calmly. What I had asked was nothing more than a selfish desire relying on Yoon Hamin’s character.

“I just came here to see if you could perhaps help me find my device at the academy…”

“Is that why you didn’t come to school today?”

“No, um… Strictly speaking, it is related.”

I shrugged as I answered.

“…Really?”

Yoon Hamin looked a bit skeptical, likely recalling my appearance from yesterday. My blazer and shirt were drenched in bl**d, and the shirt’s sleeves were tattered to the point of becoming sleeveless; given my chaotic state, it made sense that he would react that way.

I sighed deeply.

“I was supposed to receive a scholarship through the device, but since I don’t have it, I’m a bit in trouble.”

As I spoke honestly, Yoon Hamin gasped and cautiously got up from his seat. I wondered where he was going since we hadn’t finished eating, but when he returned, he held another device in his hand.

“It’s yours.”

Yoon Hamin sat down and handed it to me. Stunned, I took it, turned on the screen, and checked the contacts first.

I confirmed that there were only two contacts in the phone directory—Yoon Hamin and Orca.

I was puzzled about how he managed to find something like this without me even asking. As I absentmindedly fiddled with the device, he seemed to have another question as if he wanted to know something.

“…Kanna, I haven’t mentioned it to the teacher yet, but did you get dragged away by the monster?”

Hearing those words, I almost flinched. I never imagined Yoon Hamin would spring such a question on me, and I nearly let out a hollow laugh.

But thankfully, I managed to suppress my emotions. I could just keep my mouth shut.

I was simply there to ask for his help.

“Kanna.”

But it seemed Yoon Hamin wasn’t so easily dissuaded.

“Tell me. I helped you after all. So you should help me too.”

Hearing that made me shrink back a bit. I wanted to ask why he was doing this, whether he still couldn’t trust someone like me after all this time.

“…I want to believe. Even without evidence, I want to believe.”

“Why are you going so far?”

I answered apathetically, and Yoon Hamin trembled.

“It’s a sad thing that no one believes you…”

At those words, I had no choice but to freeze in response.

“You can get used to it. You don’t have to believe me.”

“Why…?”

“I don’t need pitying trust.”

I set my fork down with a clatter in front of the half-eaten plate.

Just as I was about to storm out, Yoon Hamin clenched his fist and blocked my way.

“This isn’t pity.”

His trembling fist seemed to be filled with countless emotions.

“It’s not pity… Another grade teacher told me that you showed how to deal with the monster you encountered. I don’t know who said it first, but your efforts in letting people know about it made a big difference. They praised you for that, you know?”

Yoon Hamin spoke and locked his intense gaze onto me. His golden eyes sparkled like starlight burning brightly.

“It’s you, isn’t it? You knew and said that, didn’t you…?”

I kept my mouth shut. I simply looked at Yoon Hamin’s face.

Honestly, I thought it would just be a passing story. But clearly, the teachers had discussed it separately and conveyed that conversation, which had now led us here.

There was a possibility that some student had been asked to relay such information, and now the source of that information needed to be

investigated.

Since I was missing, the teachers had likely been trying to find my acquaintances and eventually went to the homeroom teacher because they found no answers.

Yoon Hamin seemed to have that conviction.

“…Do you know?”

He believed it firmly. It wasn’t a belief born of pity.

“That you saved someone at the academy. People around there, or even those who live further away, know that you saved someone.”

Yoon Hamin’s voice trembled.

“So, this isn’t pity… so…”

His voice sounded like he was on the verge of tears.

“Can you make me believe you, just once more…?”

That voice, which so desperately wanted to believe me, felt unbearably sad. It was a voice that almost made me choke up as well.

Ch. 29 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 29

The collapse of the barrier, and simultaneously, everyone’s panic at the sudden emergence of the monster from thin air.

Most witnesses testified that the monster that revealed itself was not a creature modeled after an animal, but rather an eerie being that looked artificially created.

The original methods for dealing with monsters included inflicting injuries until their regeneration limits were reached, or suppressing them to destroy their cores, divided into those two approaches.

However, the unusually appeared monsters did not respond to such methods at all. Whether they had infinite magical power or were created that way from the start, their cores were impossible to penetrate with any weapon, leaving only superficial scratches.

Just when everyone thought it was impossible to k*ll them,

When despair settled in, thinking it was a monster that would cause tremendous casualties,

Someone was running.

Someone shouted that there was a way to deal with the monster. At the moment when the heroes were about to sit down, thinking it impossible, this made them rise again to fight.

At first, there was uncertainty, but what could be done if they didn’t believe it? After all, what awaited them was d*ath, coupled with the despair and demise of others.

As long as the desire to prevent that was not in vain, even if it seemed absurd, the heroes stretched out their hands in desperation.

And the moment it was proven, the heroes desperately sought the person who spoke those words.

The student shouted.

“A certain teacher told me!”

But the student was a liar. Every teacher echoed that they knew nothing of such information.

Information was thrown out, but everyone insisted it wasn’t them. And within that, the student disappeared.

Amidst the inability to be certain or confirm anything, only Yoon Hamin overheard the words and was convinced.

*

“Make me believe…”

It was only natural to feel that way.

It was regrettable to have come out saying I couldn’t believe due to lack of evidence.

Kanna Aurora ran for someone despite knowing that no one would believe her. In the end, she had carried out her beliefs, and compared to that, I was nothing but a rookie.

I chided myself for lacking experience and strength to uphold my beliefs, but one person, without strength, knowledge, or company, ran as if disregarding all that.

Of course, I wouldn’t know the circumstances since I wasn’t on-site, but having seen Kanna before, I understood.

If it was Kanna who spoke of the falling barrier and spoke of the monster’s weaknesses, then that information all came from Kanna Aurora, her.

So instead of demanding proof, I simply wished to hear her speak.

I wanted to apologize for doubting, apologize for not believing.

So, I prayed to be made to believe just once again.

Kanna looked a bit troubled.

“Even if you say that…”

She hesitated, her words trailing off.

I quietly waited for Kanna to speak.

Then Kanna’s voice broke the silence.

“Even if you say that, I can’t do anything for you. I…”

That was okay.

I wouldn’t ask for evidence anymore.

Once I saw it, I would come to certainty.

From then on, I would judge not to doubt.

Her voice had already saved thousands, hundreds of thousands of lives, hadn’t it?

Yet if I still doubted, that would be nothing less than insanity.

“It’s okay.”

I cut off her increasingly uneasy voice.

Don’t worry, I told her, don’t hesitate.

“It’s okay without proof. You don’t have to show me directly. Just, I will believe you.”

She was someone I had once cut off.

But putting that back together required too much, and it was exhausting.

I felt sorry and sometimes regretted why I did such a thing.

I was surely here, having received the power of the stars.

But unlike me, a true star-like being was here.

A being that, despite its solitude, kept its place and shone.

Why had such power chosen me?

Those doubts also arose.

It must have hurt. Regardless of whether it hid the wounds or what they were, if she was covered in that much bl**d, it must have hurt.

Her blazer was torn, her shirt in tatters; there was no way it hadn’t hurt.

Yet she didn’t say anything to anyone; perhaps it was because no one could be relied upon.

Perhaps it was because nobody believed in her, leaving her lonely.

“So just this once, can you believe in me too?”

To believe ultimately meant demanding trust from the other party as well.

The other party had to believe that I trusted them.

One side could believe unilaterally, but that was either one side telling lies or one side unilaterally expecting something.

I wanted nothing but that, a belief.

I didn’t want to impose a burden with words of expectation.

I wanted to believe, and I hoped that Kanna would believe that I would.

Kanna, more than anyone else.

She seemed to shine brighter than I, who bore the power of stars.

So desperately I wished for it, and Kanna cautiously opened her mouth.

“…Do as you wish.”

“…….”

I sealed my lips tight.

I couldn’t force belief from the outset, and if saying that meant really believing, then that too would carry its own weight, and I had nothing to say.

Kanna said that and then hesitated.

“I’ll, I’ll go now. I have to get going before night falls.”

“I’ll walk you home.”

“No, it’s okay.”

“You went alone last night too. It’s dangerous to walk around alone nowadays.”

Kanna hesitated for a moment at those words and then nodded.

That seemed a bit scary.

I smiled bitterly and quickly entered the room to grab a coat.

*

Yoon Hamin had an upright and strong personality.

That was an already known fact.

Still, because he clearly drew the line between right and wrong, I thought he would be a bit impenetrable in places like this.

Fortunately, for the first time, he raised his voice as if he would believe me.

If he meant it sincerely, then what he shouted about the monster’s weakness might not have been meaningless.

Because of that, he did get caught by the monster and suffered harshly, but still.

It couldn’t be denied that I felt joy at his willingness to believe.

It felt as if some of the pain was lifted.

It felt almost absurd how my emotions fluctuated.

On the way home, I tried to refuse his offer to walk me, but could not help allowing him to accompany me due to concerns about being alone.

I was reminded of the monster’s smile, making me uneasy.

I cautiously walked beside him, scanning the surroundings, and he glanced at me before speaking.

“…What happened to your uniform, what went on?”

I paused at his voice.

At first, it was about content I couldn’t believe anyway, and I had no evidence to offer, so I didn’t want to say anything.

But this time was different.

Yoon Hamin said he would believe me, even without evidence, so I had a choice to make—whether to believe those words or not.

Of course, even if I heard those words, it didn’t mean I could suddenly believe them, so I had to ask at least once.

“Do you really believe me?”

Honestly, I could respond with a casual ‘yes’ and then just not believe it.

Yet if I wasn’t going to believe it, there was no reason to probe further, so I laughed bitterly.

If I thought it was just empty talk, I would brush it off or let it slip in a moment of light conversation to make fun of me.

Since he was Yoon Hamin, the latter wouldn’t happen.

Yoon Hamin answered without hesitation.

“Yeah.”

I thought it was quite commendable.

No matter how many times he said he believed me, one would think there would be a moment of hesitation.

Some might feel disappointment or hurt during that fleeting moment, but I could empathize.

Yet it was impressive that he didn’t hesitate.

If he had been the type to get emotional over such a fleeting moment, he might have been genuinely glad.

“I was captured by the monster.”

Yoon Hamin’s eyes widened at those words.

His footsteps, which had followed mine well, suddenly froze, causing him to briefly disappear from my view.

When I turned to look at Yoon Hamin, he regarded me with a frown.

“…What did you say?”

“I said I was captured by the monster.”

Since he said he believed me, I thought, what was there to hide?

I spoke seriously with that thought, but it seemed Yoon Hamin was quite shocked.

I figured he would have reacted the same, even if I had told him to brace himself for what he would hear.

“Was it because I caught your interest that you spared me? I suppose it’s fortunate that I survived.”

As I continued with a bitter smile, Yoon Hamin’s expression twisted.

He opened his mouth as if to say something but then closed it tightly.

On the way back, Yoon Hamin’s expression darkened immensely.

I pressed on to him like a wedge.

“So that’s why your clothes looked like that. I’ll go to the academy as soon as my uniform is cleaned up.”

After saying that, I noticed Yoon Hamin’s gaze tremble.

As that gaze fixed on me, it felt as if complicated emotions were conveyed straight to me.

“W-what… how…”

Since the monster’s presence hadn’t been felt until the middle of the story, his surprise wasn’t surprising.

Too many things were tangled together.

By erasing the totem, the future became disarrayed.

So it was inevitable for Yoon Hamin to be shocked, and there was no smooth progression of the story left anywhere.

The same applied to me, so I could no longer pretend to know the future.

I lightly tapped Yoon Hamin’s arm.

“Yoon Hamin, if you keep making that gloomy face, even the sky will darken.”

I could see his previously distorted expression straighten a bit.

“That’s enough for now. I’ll head back.”

“Uh, uh? R-right…”

“See you on Thursday.”

With that, I waved my hand in farewell.

Yoon Hamin wore a bewildered expression but soon hurriedly waved his hand to bid farewell.

“Kanna!”

At the call, I turned my head.

“See you on Thursday!”

Goodness. Was that what he wanted to say when he called me?

I responded to Yoon Hamin with a gentle smile.

Ch. 30 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 30

I rested for two consecutive days like that. During that time, what I did was take the funding that came in at the beginning of the month to repair and wash my academy uniform.

The store boss, seeing the condition of my uniform, thought I had fought fiercely due to the previous attack and said he would do the washing and repairs for free, but my shirt was damaged beyond repair, so I had to buy it myself.

Embracing my gratitude, I bought a shirt for the academy uniform, which was quite expensive, making me feel a bit sour.

Still, it was a relief for me to be able to wear a decent uniform and go to the academy again.

"…Ahem."

I cleared my throat and looked into the mirror. There I saw ivory-colored hair and purple eyes staring back at me.

Seeing the blazer's sleeves, which had been reinforced with a sewing machine because the previous rough stitching had come apart too easily, gave me a sense of reassurance. Moreover, thanks to the thorough washing, there were no stains left, boasting a clean white appearance.

The texture of the newly purchased shirt was quite nice, and as I adjusted the collar and tied the ribbon, I felt a sense of relief wash over me.

I straightened my blazer and tidied up to move comfortably.

Fighting spirit for today.

I gathered my resolve in front of the mirror and exited the restroom.

*

Thursdays are usually tiring days, but after three days off in the past five, it didn't feel that exhausting or difficult for me. I took only my device and set off.

I thought my bag would be somewhere within the academy, but since I hadn't found it yet, I entered the classroom empty-handed.

The moment the door opened, all eyes turned toward me. Normally, I would have ignored this and gone about my business, but this time it stirred a commotion.

Isn't it a bit too blatant? I thought, but these individuals in last place seemed to not care about such things.

I kept my mouth tightly shut and fixed my gaze on the place I needed to go. I didn't see the need to look elsewhere and tried to move forward without turning my head, but a hand reached into my field of vision.

My eyes widened at the sight. I turned my head naturally.

I thought I didn't need to look anywhere else, but I couldn't help but notice the person waving their hand.

"Kanna, hi!"

With a vibrant smile, Yoon Hamin greeted me, causing the corners of my lips to tremble.

With dark hair as deep as the night sky and golden eyes that shone like stars, his presence naturally evoked this reaction.

If Yoon Hamin greeted me so warmly, it seemed everyone couldn't help but feel a swell of emotion, even if just for a moment.

After Yoon Hamin said hello, Orca, who was sitting next to him, turned to me with a smile. Then she slightly stood up.

“Hello. I’m glad you’re safe…”

Seeing her appear relieved, it didn’t look like she intended to say anything hurtful to me. As I moved forward, receiving greetings from the top and second students, I awkwardly smiled in response.

“Hi, hello.”

After greeting Yoon Hamin and Orca in turn, I naturally tried to return to my seat. The moment I reached my desk, I widened my eyes in surprise; my bag was sitting on top of it.

I was certain I had lost it while fleeing without even being able to enter the classroom, so I was bewildered by how it had made its way back to me.

I blankly turned my head. Yoon Hamin smiled at me as if to say he had found it.

He seemed to have some talent for finding things. Of course, there had to be some relation for it to be connected, but still, it could be considered a talent at this point.

He had also found me after I was just released from the monster, found my smartphone, and even my bag.

“By the way…”

I chuckled softly as I placed my bag beside the desk.

Now that I think about it, what classes do we have today? I recalled this and checked the timetable, taking out the books on my desk, which made me feel uneasy.

…After being absent for nearly a week, next week’s exam is really going to be a lost cause.

Of course, the reason I had intentionally taken a break until Wednesday was that I had no confidence in taking the exam. I had already missed school in such a situation, so studying was out of the question.

And, having left my bag here, I had no materials at home, so self-studying wasn't really an option.

As the attendance time approached…

"…Kanna?"

Lucia, the homeroom teacher, entered the classroom to call out the attendance and, unconsciously following the direction of my seat, widened her eyes when she saw me.

Now that I think about it, I had taken such a long absence from school; should I have gone to the faculty room first instead of the classroom?

I smiled bitterly and nodded.

"Hello."

Then the teacher hesitated before confirming there were no empty seats and gestured to me with a trembling voice.

"I'll assume no one else came. Kanna, could you please follow me for a moment?"

"Sure."

I replied and pulled my chair back to stand up.

Everyone was likely sitting quietly in the classroom, confirming attendance and receiving instructions from the teachers. Thus, there was a silence in the hallway.

A silence that wouldn't be heard in other classrooms.

The teacher who took me to the stairs immediately started examining me carefully. Then she reached for my hand and pulled me closer to confirm something.

“…T-teacher?”

As I took a step back in shock, the teacher seemed flustered and carefully released my hand.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I just wanted to check if you were hurt anywhere… I had no way to contact you, and since you hadn’t come to the academy since that day, I was worried something had happened.”

I swallowed hard.

The reason I hadn’t contacted anyone was that I had lost my device, which Yoon Hamin had been holding. It seemed I had lost my communication network due to one simple sentence from Yoon Hamin saying he had it.

I had something to say about that, but I couldn’t answer where I had been and how I got back.

Knowing Yoon Hamin well, I was confident that if he believed me, that was enough.

So, while I had things I could tell Yoon Hamin, those were not conversations meant for the teacher.

“…I was slightly hurt by the monster, but I’m okay now.”

I said lightly, as if I hadn’t gone through something serious. The teacher nodded upon seeing my condition.

Physically, there was no issue, so there was no choice but to believe me, and it quickly moved on.

Did teachers have to ask such things regardless? Before I could even show my doubts, the teacher carefully looked around and asked me a question.

“…Kanna, did you communicate how to deal with the monster during the last attack?”

Even if heroes spread through the world, they were ultimately a closed group due to their profession. Considering that the academy was a place that produced heroes, it was even more so.

Thus, any information within would be easily obtained, and it seemed what I had said had become apparent.

In this situation, I had no way to deny it.

“Yes, I did.”

Upon hearing that, the teacher sighed as if it were true. It seemed her deep breath came with a lot of worry.

“…You said before that the monster would attack the academy soon.”

The teacher asked me in a serious voice.

“Think about it. Who could possibly foresee that?”

Already, this was my mistake.

If I had known it would turn out like this, I regretted not asking for help from the teacher.

Looking back, it was a simple matter. Just because I said something didn’t mean everyone would side with me; I wanted to blame myself for revealing the information so easily.

“Normally, monsters arrive on foot, but to get here quickly, they would at least have to fly. But at the moment you said it, the monster appeared from nowhere. That’s unusual; how did you predict something like that?”

The teacher’s gaze pierced into me.

“…And you were the one who said the barrier would break too.”

I bowed my head as if I were being scolded.

My lips trembled. I had no idea what to say in this situation, which made it even more of a headache.

“Kanna. Your words saved countless lives. It’s certainly something to be praised, and it wouldn’t be strange if you were awarded the title of a hero. You prevented an event that could historically be considered a disaster.”

The teacher continued, sounding troubled.

“…But where did that information come from? Other heroes mentioned they heard it from another teacher; who is that other teacher, Kanna?”

There was a hint of suspicion in the teacher’s eyes.

“…Can I ask who is behind you?”

At that question, my heart began to race wildly.

Ch. 31 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 31

Yoon Hamin’s promise to unconditionally believe me felt heavy on his lips. Because of that, no matter what I said, he seemed to stop at just hearing the words or moving based on their trust, which was more than I could hope for.

Even Orca, who was next to me, kept her mouth shut, making her a very good person to confide in.

However, I felt a strong desire to do my best and ended up sharing information with the teacher as well. And that information was now aimed at me like the sharp edge of a kn*fe.

I stood out more than anyone for thinking what no one else had.

I was the one who said that the barrier, which no one thought would break, would soon collapse.

I was the one who said that a monster would invade the academy, which no one thought would be attacked.

I was the one who offered a breakthrough in a situation where no one could find a solution.

It was a situation where I couldn’t help but raise suspicions. It was a situation where the source of that information could not be doubted.

So the teacher asked me this question.

Who is behind you?

Whether there was someone behind me or not was a problem. If there was, it meant that someone with significant power, unknown to the academy's heroes, existed. Conversely, if there wasn't, it meant that Kanna and I, just by existing, could become a danger.

While I hesitated, the teacher quietly continued speaking.

"I'm not trying to blame anyone. I'm just curious."

I opened my eyes wide and raised my head at the teacher's voice.

"Of course, there are many doubts. But I'm not intending to harm someone who took the risk to speak up."

My gaze wavered.

I could never have dreamed that they would say this.

"Teacher."

"I'd like to say that if it's too much, you don't have to share… but still, I want to hear it. However, if there's nothing extra, I want to protect you. I'm a teacher after all."

I swallowed the laugh that almost burst out.

As the one at the very bottom of the academy, the last place, the only thing I could receive was a simple minimum of kindness. Even that I could get from the teachers, while from my fellow students, I only received contempt and ridicule.

But perhaps because I had acted somewhat heroically, or perhaps because I had saved countless lives that were nearly lost, the teacher had shown a certain level of interest in me.

Facing that, I pondered for a moment.

In the end, I realized that if I lied, I would be found out sooner or later, and once that happened, a huge misunderstanding would be irrevocable. I

organized my trembling heart and quietly opened my mouth toward the teacher.

“I don’t think anyone would believe me if I said it was me…”

“I see.”

The teacher’s eyes seemed to shake for a moment. It seemed she recalled something she had said before.

I could understand that anyone would think it was just a strange excuse from the last place who didn’t want to take the exam. I thought the ones who couldn’t understand could be the selfish ones.

“Teacher, I think it’s about time…”

“Oh, class…”

As the bell rang, the teacher hurriedly checked the time and sent me back. Even in the midst of that return, she reminded me once again that her words hadn’t changed.

“Kanna, if you need help, please let me know. If you can’t clarify the source, I’ll be the source for you. It will definitely be helpful.”

I understood those words.

The teachers probably believed in a survival of the fittest, both in terms of the ranking system and shared affection.

Becoming a hero or not. Since the teachers themselves were heroes, they were quite influenced by that fact. Therefore, they paid a lot of attention to capable talents like Yoon Hamin and Orca.

In short, what Teacher Lucia was saying to me now was that she believed the information I was sharing would be helpful to the heroes and humanity.

If everything fell into place, regardless of how unclear the source might be, it would save lives, bring stability, peace, and quiet.

No matter how suspicious it seemed, in the end, it treated me as someone worthy of being a hero who protected people.

After all, even if it was suspicion, it was overflowing in a society where Awakened Ones existed and people with abilities thrived, so that judgment must have been made.

“I understand.”

I replied as I was heading back to the classroom. It seemed I wouldn’t need to rely on the teacher.

I had enough places to lean on already, and besides, there wasn’t much information left for me to use.

And if I moved too conspicuously, I couldn’t anticipate when the monster might try to drag me away again, so I wasn’t planning on moving too diligently.

Still, I was grateful and held deep gratitude in my heart.

I was never turned over to the authorities as suspicious nor dragged away to do something, and even more so because they were willing to help me, I couldn’t help but feel grateful, even if it was empty talk.

Of course, my fear hadn’t vanished.

If the source of information wasn’t my ability, then I feared that if I stopped providing information, the situation would worsen, and the sharp blade of blame would turn toward me.

Wouldn’t I be pointed out as the monster’s spy?

*

“Ugh.”

As soon as class started, I was immediately faced with difficulties. Even though I tried to concentrate on studying, the unfamiliar content poured in,

making it extremely difficult.

With dazed eyes, I attempted to jot everything down in my notebook, but it wasn’t that easy.

When break time came, Yoon Hamin quietly approached me and asked.

“Kanna, how’s your studying going?”

“…Not at all.”

Considering that I hadn’t studied for a few days, I glared at him with bewildered eyes. Despite that, Yoon Hamin flashed a bright smile, unaffected by my glare.

“Yeah, I can imagine. If it’s tough, do you want me to help?”

“No, I’ll try on my own.”

It was difficult, but it wasn’t something someone else could solve for me.

Just because someone handed me their notes to memorize didn’t mean I could actually memorize anything.

Moreover, what I was struggling with wasn’t anything else but the fact that I had to cram two weeks’ worth of lessons into my head within a week. I had to understand everything I’d learned before that as well.

“Kanna?”

“Uh. Yes?”

This time it was Orca.

She cautiously approached me and looked at me silently.

“I thought you might not be able to keep up since you didn’t attend last week’s body techniques class. Would you like to come to my house this weekend for training… together?”

Her words made my eyes widen.

It seemed I had definitely earned some goodwill because of this recent incident. I felt glad and thought it would be great to solidify this opportunity, so I nodded immediately.

“Yes, yes! Please!”

With that, Orca smiled back at me.

“Great. Let’s work hard to make up for lost time.”

Extending her hand to me, who had constantly been in last place, she offered help, as someone who used to be above me, she intended to help me with a different heart.

There was no reason to refuse that, so I gladly accepted.

“…This is all I can do for you…”

“It’s more than enough.”

Smiling widely, I replied, causing Yoon Hamin to smirk.

“Then how about we plan the weekend while eating?”

“Uh… I’m not really hungry…”

I raised my hand slightly in response to his words. Almost heading toward the cafeteria, I calmed my startled heart.

Having received support funds, I’d ended up spending quite a lot on dress shirts. Consequently, I didn’t have nearly enough money left for the expensive school meals.

Of course, if I kept showing signs of not spending money or not eating, it could seem strange.

Because of that, I had thought of something seriously. It had been an idea I had been considering for two days before coming to school. It was a thought I couldn't help but have from the moment I bought the dress shirts.

As soon as I mentioned that, Yoon Hamin and Orca's gazes concentrated on me.

"…Ah."

Seeing their reaction, Yoon Hamin hesitated for a moment before nodding.

"Is that so? Then there's nothing we can do about it…"

He said this with a disappointed expression and voice before moving on to another topic.

The subject of the weekly exams was now the focus of discussion.

Because I had missed a week and even skipped one exam, I was still stuck in last place.

I'd likely stay in that position again for next week.

However, seeing the determination of Yoon Hamin and Orca that they would help me get out of last place by the end of this semester, or even this school year, made me feel happy.

An hour had passed since the class bell rang, and the last class of the morning soon came to an end.

Lunchtime had arrived. Everyone seemed to be heading out to eat. Yoon Hamin and Orca asked me again, but I replied that I wasn't hungry and successfully stayed behind alone.

"…Hmm."

There was no one in the classroom, and no one in the hallway. They must have really gone to the cafeteria.

Honestly, the school meals were tasty. With the monthly support funds, I could eat well throughout the month, and it wouldn’t be strange to say it was one of the happiness I could savor.

But that dress shirt was a problem.

Still, since it was unavoidable, I decided to save just one meal a day and went to the store to buy some bread.

Comparing the price of school meals and bread, bread was much more affordable.

I stuffed the bread and milk into my blazer pocket and headed to the bathroom, which was almost like my home ground. I didn’t usually prefer this, but there was no choice. The only place that came to mind for eating alone without Yoon Hamin and Orca was here.

I entered the last stall in the bathroom, crumpled the bag and took a bite of the bread.

It had been a while since I experienced such taste and feeling, but I didn’t miss it. It was merely an act to fill my stomach.

“…!”

While I was eating the bread, I suddenly heard the presence of someone.

Even if there weren’t many people around, as long as there was a bathroom, it couldn’t be entirely unused.

I figured someone must be coming in to touch up their makeup. I stepped onto the toilet seat and placed my shoes behind me.

As long as I wasn’t coughing or anything while I was here, I wouldn’t get discovered. No, even if I was discovered, I could just act calmly…

Knock, knock.

I felt my mind go blank at the knocking on the door.

Huh? Why would they knock here when there are so many other stalls?

Feeling disgruntled, I was about to curse the person on the other side when they opened their mouth.

“Kanna. Please come out.”

Please, act like you don’t see me. I feel like I’m going to d*e from embarrassment…

Having a friend isn’t always a good thing.

I was thankful for the concern, but my face felt like it was on fire.

Ch. 32 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 32

“It’s strange, isn’t it?”

From the outside, it just looks locked, and even if I try to look down, my feet are on top of the toilet, so how would they know it’s me?

I hold on to my doubts and complaints, but Orca seems to be urging me on as if time is just passing by.

“Kanna?”

There was no questioning whether it was right. She walked straight up and pinpointed my location with impressive skill.

Even if she claims to have seen me go in, there’s usually no reason to call for me while waiting outside the bathroom.

It seems like I’m being followed. Otherwise, there’s no way I’d be hearing someone asking me to come out of the bathroom.

It wouldn’t be some new kind of harassment to ask me to come out while I’m busy…

Of course, Orca wasn’t the type to have such a personality, so it probably wasn’t that.

I just wish she would quietly go away for now.

Today was the day I really wanted a cream puff. The soft custard cream mixed with strawberry milk had a good vibe to it.

But I just took two bites and found myself conflicted about what to do next.

Knock, knock.

With the knocks not waiting for me, I felt my mind go blank.

I had long since thrown the plastic away in the trash can to make no noise, so putting it back in my pocket wrapped up was out of the question.

But just tossing it in the trash felt wasteful, given the price of that bread.

Holding the bread with one hand, I shut my eyes tightly.

Since she already knows I'm here, it would be stranger to keep quiet, so I opened my mouth.

"Um, I… I'm using the bathroom right now…"

"I know you're not."

I desperately tried to resist, but as expected, it was futile.

If someone is trying to pull someone out of the bathroom, how could they not know? I must be the type who holds on to things too stubbornly.

"Kanna, there aren't many people around, so hurry and come out."

I forgot my precious feelings and shut my eyes tightly.

Then I took the remaining milk in one shot and threw the bread and milk pack into the trash can.

Wearing my shoes, I stood up and nonchalantly pulled the toilet lever.

At the same time the water flowed down, I unlocked the latch and slightly opened the door.

Standing on the other side was Orca Lamiris, with blonde hair and sparkling blue eyes.

She gazed at me quietly.

She knew I wasn’t supposed to be here and already understood what I was doing, but I acted nonchalant.

In reality, my face was too hot to hide anything.

“…Haha, I’m feeling a bit off today…”

As I forced a smile and tried to slip past her, Orca stepped into the stall I had been in.

Even without grabbing my arm, my body froze.

Is it being stabbed? Should I say I hesitated?

I stood there, turning my head and sweating profusely.

Orca lightly nudged the trash can with her foot without closing the door.

At the clattering sound, it felt like my heart sank.

I wanted to flee the scene, but surely she wouldn’t see, right? Yet, it seemed she had already found the bread and milk pack I threw away.

“Kanna.”

“…Yes.”

“Follow me.”

“Okay.”

d*mn.

*

I sat in my seat, fidgeting with my fingers like a guilty person.

Normally, it would be a rare empty spot in the break room during lunch, but Yoon Hamin and Orca were sitting there casually as if it was natural for them to be there.

Orca, sitting across from me, looked at me with a somewhat pitying expression.

Caught by that gaze, I felt a little embarrassed, causing my shoulders to hunch.

“Kanna, why were you eating in such a place?”

Since there were still people around, I didn’t mention it was the bathroom, but it seemed she couldn’t help but ask.

Others might not know where that place is, but I was mortified.

My face was burning hot.

My lips curled.

“Um…”

I hesitated, glancing back and forth between Yoon Hamin and Orca before sighing.

Honestly, I had opened my mouth, but I didn’t know what to say.

No matter what I say, I wasn’t confident I could explain the situation.

So my mouth shut again.

Yoon Hamin, who was next to me, cautiously asked.

“Is there a specific reason?”

“No, it’s just… I, I don’t have money for lunch…”

As I stammered out that answer, the atmosphere suddenly turned solemn.

And Yoon Hamin nodded as if he understood something.

But Orca did not remain silent after hearing that.

“Wait, so you threw away the bread from there?”

I fell silent.

I didn’t want to be labeled as the weird kid who eats in the bathroom.

But Orca witnessed it and even saw my attempt to destroy evidence, which probably surprised her when I mentioned being broke.

“No, it’s just… I was so startled that I didn’t think someone would come…!”

“Ah, that’s my fault, so I’ll buy you another one.”

“That’s too much…”

“No, it’s necessary to do this.”

With a firm voice, Orca replied, glancing over at Yoon Hamin.

“Are you going to get up? It seems there’s still half of lunch break left, so it won’t be late if we go now.”

“Oh, right, we need to eat.”

Yoon Hamin jumped up from his seat, and Orca also looked at me and stood up.

It looked like they were inviting me to go together.

But I wondered, the convenience store is open even during breaks, so what’s the rush?

“…Um.”

I said absent-mindedly as I looked at my tray.

I thought Orca would only buy the bread I discarded from the convenience store, but instead, she brought me to the cafeteria.

The cafeteria had been running for over an hour.

It’s a place that allows you to eat as much as you want, so there’s no concept of closing early.

The problem was why I was here.

I had no money. So I wasn’t planning to eat at the cafeteria today.

But Orca pulled out a cafeteria card for me.

Even more so, it was the A meal, which is the tastiest among A, B, and C.

“Uh, this is…”

“Take it. I’m buying it for you. I always wanted to try it later, so this works out well.”

Orca told me with a chuckle.

Receiving such warmth made me feel as if my tears were on the verge of spilling.

Since I received it, I felt thankful and decided to eat.

Grilled barbecue meat with cheese-topped corn.

I swallowed hard at the arrival of such luxurious food.

It looked so appetizing that I wanted to take a bite of something in my hand, but knowing I shouldn’t eat like that, I tried to restrain myself.

Swallowing, I glanced around and assuredly started my meal after seeing Orca’s smile.

The meat cut smoothly, and once in my mouth, the flavor filled my mouth with juices as I chewed, making me feel euphoric.

Orca, sitting across from me, smiled and asked.

“Is it good?”

“Oh, cough, uh…”

“Hey, take your time.”

I was slightly surprised at how I was eating a bit frantically as if others would look, but it seemed I was mistaken.

Hearing her genuine inquiry made me finally swallow the food that was stuck in my throat.

A little pain brought tears to my eyes.

After finally swallowing, I sipped the soup beside me and managed to respond.

“It’s delicious…”

They say the C meal is just ordinary tasty food, but the A meal felt more luxurious, which was making my mouth happy.

It’s true that eating delicious food cheers you up to some extent.

I felt my lips involuntarily curve upwards.

Yoon Hamin, watching me eat, faced me with a big smile.

What could he find so amusing that he smiled like that?

More importantly…

“Oh, Orca.”

I cautiously spoke to her.

Orca paused her fork and stared at me intently.

“You can speak comfortably.”

“…No, it’s not that, it’s just… my meal is the A meal, but you seem to have the B meal.”

Honestly, I enjoyed receiving.

No one dislikes free things.

But I knew it wasn’t good to be too fond of free stuff.

Moreover, since I was the one receiving it, I felt pressure for her to have something more expensive.

Sweating, I waited for Orca’s answer, and she smiled wryly.

“I don’t really like greasy food.”

“Is… is that so…”

The B meal looked more vegetable-based, but it also seemed quite tasty, so it didn’t really matter.

After all, if cooked well, even that can be delicious.

“Do you want to try the B meal later, Kanna? B meal is cheaper because it’s vegetable-based, but the sauce is still tasty.”

Yoon Hamin’s words made me nod silently.

Though today was a bit embarrassing, receiving this kind of consideration didn’t seem entirely bad.

Of course, I firmly resolved in my heart that I wouldn’t lean on their kindness.

Ch. 33 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 33

I had no intention of forcibly suggesting a meal to someone who said they weren’t hungry. I could say that I’d pay for the meal and just ask them to fill the seat, but there was no reason to go that far.

The real reason I wanted to eat was different.

It was because the conversation that had started with Kanna during a previous meal was lingering in my mind.

The story about the barrier breaking seemed too absurd to believe without evidence. However, Kanna’s words had become reality, and the barrier had collapsed, killing people.

I couldn’t help but wonder if the barrier wouldn’t have fallen if I had paid even a little attention to Kanna’s words.

If it was someone from the Lamiris family, the eldest daughter no less, it would have been reasonable to double-check the status of the barrier.

Considering the budget for that wouldn’t be trivial since the people checking aren’t a charity organization, it seemed burdensome. But still, if that could prevent people from dying, how beautiful that story would be.

Well, if they say they’re not hungry, perhaps I should aim for tomorrow.

So, I took a step back. It was lunch time, and I walked the hallway with Yoon Hamin.

We were heading to the cafeteria, but today, Yoon Hamin was walking slowly.

“Yoon Hamin?”

He had stopped and turned to look at me, and his gaze seemed resolute, making me a bit nervous.

He appeared to be contemplating whether to say something.

Before long, I understood the reason for his expression.

“…Orca, can we eat a little late today? Kanna is on my mind.”

Yoon Hamin was worried about Kanna.

Since I was equally concerned, I readily agreed.

But I still did not have a clear answer as to what he wanted to do.

“Sure. But I’d like you to tell me what you’d like to do.”

“It’s not anything special… but Kanna seems to be in a lot of trouble.”

“Trouble?”

“I sometimes think that Kanna struggles to get along with the other kids.”

Yoon Hamin articulated his thoughts one by one.

I nodded along and listened closely.

“Furthermore, being in last place, she’s often disregarded…”

“…That’s true.”

I had nothing to say regarding that.

We were mere bystanders too.

“Given that, Kanna has almost no place where she can feel at ease, right?”

“Right…?”

“So when she wants to eat, I ponder where she might be eating, and if she’s starving, I had something pop into my head.”

I looked at him wide-eyed.

If she gets scolded for taking a spot to eat alone, wouldn’t it be easier to just buy a bread from the snack bar and go to the rooftop or the stairs? But it sounded like Yoon Hamin was about to say it wasn’t that simple.

“What do you mean?”

Worried about being overheard, Yoon Hamin looked around before finally speaking after confirming there were not many people around.

“I think Kanna might be eating in the bathroom…”

“Excuse me?”

I wondered if I had misheard.

“I think… she’s eating in the bathroom…”

But he seemed partially convinced.

The fact that I hadn’t misheard left me speechless.

“No, the, bathroom?”

Who on earth eats in a bathroom?

Even though the academy’s bathrooms were clean enough that there was no smell, it was still not a place for eating.

I wanted to dismiss what Yoon Hamin had said as absurd.

Yet, I couldn’t completely deny it.

I already knew that for someone in last place, there was no space in this academy where they could go.

All that was left was enduring countless gazes as I went home.

In this vast academy, it was only natural that there was not a single place for someone in last place.

“Is that really true?”

When I asked again, his silence suggested the answer was the same, and I could only stay mute.

After all, there was no urgent need to eat early, so I decided to follow along with what he had said.

As we turned away from the cafeteria, I first headed to a corner of the snack bar, bustling with people.

I wondered if I really had come here despite saying I didn’t want to eat.

And as if to confirm that my doubts were meaningless, Kanna appeared through the entrance of the snack bar.

Seeing her always walking around timidly made my heart ache.

Having entered to become a hero, it stung to realize that such a being was blatantly present while I had turned my eyes away.

Kanna walked as if scared to look elsewhere, focusing only on the destination she intended to go.

I saw her buying a bread and milk from the snack bar, filling the small pockets of her blazer.

As I quietly observed that, I asked Yoon Hamin, who was watching from a hiding place.

“Why is Kanna eating like that? Does she not want to eat with us?”

If it was that, it might mean she wanted to distance herself from people who didn’t believe in her.

If that was the case, it would truly break my heart.

Yoon Hamin let out a small breath after watching Kanna exit the snack bar.

“Maybe, that’s not the case.”

He muttered softly.

Curious whether there was a different reason than what I thought, I listened more intently, and he smiled bitterly.

“It’s hard to say, but it seems like Kanna has a lot of places where money can slip away this time. Maybe that’s why she doesn’t have any money?”

“…She has no money?”

I momentarily felt dazed by an unforeseen reason.

It seemed difficult to imagine since I had lived in a wealthy and comfortable household.

Sighing, I followed behind Yoon Hamin again.

Kanna walked earnestly, and I followed her bit by bit.

I saw a bathroom in a tucked-away corner that seemed like only a few people would visit, and Kanna slipped inside.

Seeing that made me feel a heavy heart, forcing me to look at Yoon Hamin.

“What should we do?”

The sudden question made my mind freeze.

“I can’t go in.”

“True.”

The ladies’ restroom. I had gotten close but hadn’t seen anyone else enter.

“…I’ll go take a look.”

In the end, I was able to bring Kanna out like that.

What lay in front of me was the bread and milk carton she had left uneaten.

At first, she seemed to want to deny it, but it was evident since I had already seen everything; her denying it wouldn’t change anything.

Of course, I was also mindful that Kanna would feel embarrassed.

It was clear she wouldn’t want to show herself like this, and still, if someone happened to see her, I thought she might feel ashamed.

I had considered that she would feel humiliated.

But still, I wanted to prevent her from having to eat something in such a place.

“Ugh…”

Kanna walked with her head hung low all the way to the cafeteria, her ears bright red.

Yet, when we finally arrived and I bought her a meal ticket, she seemed a bit brighter.

She looked different from earlier when she had said she didn’t want to eat.

Really, was it just about not having money? I felt a mixture of sadness and relief at that thought.

It confirmed that it wasn’t that she didn’t want to eat with me.

Watching Kanna eat, I felt good seeing her enjoy her meal.

It was not elegant or vintage, but it seemed that such forms weren’t necessarily better.

It felt like sharing something special.

“How was it?”

“Oh, it was delicious… you really didn’t have to go this far.”

After finishing our meal, Kanna grinned.

“No, it was my suggestion to come, so it couldn’t be helped.”

At those words, Kanna smiled awkwardly and couldn’t say anything more.

“Do you perhaps like bread?”

“Oh, no! I mean, not that, I do like it, but…”

“Is that so?”

Flustered, Kanna sealed her lips tight.

“If you ever want to eat bread again, just tell me you want bread. Then we’ll eat together.”

“…Yes, thank you.”

Seeing her nod made me smile without realizing it.

Yoon Hamin, watching that scene, then spoke up.

“By the way, I forgot to set up our plans this time.”

Indeed, it occurred to me then.

While eating, I had intended to figure out when we could meet over the weekend, but the event of this lunch time had struck me so hard that I had forgotten all about it.

“It’s fine since we still have tomorrow.”

After all, tomorrow remains.

We could make our plans on Friday and meet on Saturday.

“Tomorrow… sounds good.”

Kanna nodded in agreement, and Yoon Hamin responded, “That’s true,” brushing it aside.

*

“…Hah.”

Facing the mirror in front of the bathroom sink, I let out a sigh.

Because I had nearly been embarrassed for eating in the bathroom, I managed to avoid feeling humiliated thanks to Yoon Hamin and Orca.

Moreover, with their consideration, I wasn’t sure how to respond.

My body trembled. I felt a sense of happiness that made my eyes close involuntarily.

Beyond the mirror, my own smiling face was reflected.

Do I make such a face? As I contemplated that while looking closely, I felt a prick in my fingertips.

“Ouch.”

Startled, I looked at my hand, thinking it might be static electricity.

The slight tightening pain made me frown.

When the ligaments stretch, it felt as though the flesh was swelling, leaving a sensation of pressure in my bones at my fingertips.

“……”

As I recalled what happened to my hand, I wiped away my smile and scowled.

The pain that faded shortly after left me feeling a little off-kilter.

Ch. 34 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 34

Saturday was a day I didn’t go to the Academy. Still, I woke up early and diligently prepared myself while looking in the mirror.

I was busy washing, drying, and styling my hair, something that had become familiar to me by now.

“…Hmm.”

After shaking my head from side to side while looking in the mirror, I nodded and adjusted my clothes one last time. I wore a neat shirt with a blue ribbon and a blazer with blue highlights on a pure white background.

After all, the school uniform was beautiful. I regretted that when it came time to buy a new one after ruining the first, I would have to fill my days with snacks from the convenience store instead of school meals due to its high quality.

After confirming everything one last time, I brushed my hair back. Then I exited the bathroom.

“You’re here early!”

“Hehe… it just turned out that way… Did I come too early?”

“No, not at all. I had nothing to do while waiting anyway.”

At Orca’s words, I smiled bitterly and scratched my cheek. It seemed that Yoon Hamin had not arrived yet.

Having been here once before, it was easy to find my way, but without Yoon Hamin, entering this place alone made me feel a bit lost. The people of the Lamiris family weren’t bad, but I disliked the peculiar pressure they exerted.

Although they wouldn’t exert such pressure on me as a guest, just thinking about Orca feeling that pressure in this space made it hard for me to breathe.

Still, I thought it inevitable for a family that manages the barrier to be strict.

Following Orca’s lead, I stepped inside and turned my head again.

A neat modern building, a stark white mansion that seemed to suit Orca perfectly caught my eye.

Normally, I would have passed by and headed straight to the training area in the corner of the mansion’s grounds, but since Yoon Hamin was absent, Orca was guiding me into the mansion.

“Here is…”

As I hesitated to ask, Orca casually gestured to someone who looked like a secretary, indicating I shouldn’t worry.

“It’s fine. We have plenty of time, so let’s have a cup of tea.”

At her voice, I shelved my confused feelings and followed her.

“She said to let me know when Yoon Hamin arrives, so you can relax.”

As we climbed the stairs, my body froze momentarily. I hesitated for a moment, wondering if it was okay to enter a girl’s room alone. I had already nodded and was moving my feet, but suddenly shaking my head would look strange, so I felt uneasy.

I took a small breath in.

Reaching the second floor, we passed through the corridor towards Orca’s room.

I swallowed nervously, waiting for the door to open.

Inside was a girl’s room. Orca’s room, which I hadn’t faced in the novels.

I was curious about what it looked like, so my gaze was repeatedly drawn to it. However, as soon as the door opened, my heart sank.

It was truly a businesslike space, a stark landscape alternating between white and black like a go board.

Now that I think about it, my own place wasn’t exactly what you’d call a girl’s room, either, come to think of it.

“I’ll prepare the tea right away.”

Orca said that and briefly left the room. Soon after, she returned with a glass teapot filled with tea leaves.

The aroma filled the teacups.

It felt impressive that there was a guest sofa in the room. The space was so vast that it was incomparable to where I lived.

I couldn’t help but wonder if there were several rooms like this.

“How is it? Is it okay?”

“…Ah, yes.”

I nodded, lifting the teacup to match Orca’s pose.

The hot liquid slid down my throat. I swallowed with a gulp, but it didn’t particularly have any taste.

While the aroma was nice, the taste was, well, not so much. I must have liked sweet and salty, stimulating foods.

However, I wasn’t foolish enough to show my true preferences, so I tried to follow her lead.

I drank the tea, savored it, and swallowed.

Orca smiled as she watched me. Fearing my appearance while drinking tea might be clumsy, I hurriedly set the cup down as if nothing had happened.

Then, contrary to my thoughts, another topic came from her lips.

“Is your right hand okay?”

“My right hand?”

As I reflexively looked at my right hand, I could barely recall that it had been wrapped in bandages before, but it was fine now.

Letting out a sigh, I awkwardly smiled and shook my head.

“I’m fine now; it’s completely healed.”

A smooth hand. But it wasn’t a hand that had healed from an injury; it was a hand I had received after having been broken by a monster and had vanished.

It could be considered a hand that had never been hurt.

Upon hearing that, Orca hesitated before asking carefully,

“…You didn’t injure yourself on purpose, did you?”

With a hint of if, she seemed hesitant. Her words suggested concern about possibly being rude, yet she felt compelled to ask, and I nodded.

“Yes.”

Her breath seemed to pause momentarily at my succinct reply. But that didn’t last long.

She voiced the words she had harbored inside.

“I have a question.”

“Sure, if I can answer…”

“Can I ask how you thought the wall would break?”

It was a question I had heard before. It was the same question that had been thrown at me by Teacher Lucia on a day I returned to the school after a long time.

I had no secrets to keep, after all. Yoon Hamin, Orca, and Teacher Lucia knew what I had said.

Before I could open my mouth, Orca’s lips trembled.

“…Did you just guess?”

“No…!”

No way.

I feared that if I casually answered “yes!” just to hide it, I might end up complicating things. It would likely drop the trust I had built up into the bottomless pit.

So, I had to deny it with an astonished tone.

“Then how did you know?”

“Well, it’s more like an intuition that comes once in a while…”

After all, this wasn’t a story involving a time traveler. There was no one who would see my existence as strange.

With that being the case, I boldly fabricated a lie.

A lie that no one could judge as real or fake. If I said it was intuition or ability, they would have to accept it as that.

“Intuition?”

“It’s because there was this sudden feeling of unease that I couldn’t ignore, so I looked, and it came from the direction of the wall…”

I calmly continued speaking.

I couldn’t say that I had seen them in a novel and that this incident was going to happen and that everyone nearby except Yoon Hamin would d*e, so I had to twist it like this.

Orca hesitated for a moment. She seemed to find it hard to believe what I said, but on the flip side, she looked like she believed it and was shaking.

“Is that Kanna’s ability?”

No, I don’t have such a good ability.

I had some knowledge, but I had become quite ignorant about the events that would unfold, so it wasn’t that useful.

“I don’t know.”

I already knew the answer, but I wanted to give her time to think and leave a gap for her to wonder. It was nothing hefty, and she was free to ponder and embellish on her own.

“Is that so…”

At my vague response, Orca slightly slumped her shoulders. Then she took a sip of tea.

I felt a bit awkward, but I still thought this was a decent flow.

As I tilted the teacup one or two more times, I heard a knock on the door. As soon as I widened my eyes and turned my head, Orca stood up.

“It must be Yoon Hamin.”

“Looks like it.”

I also stood up after her.

“Oh, Kanna, you got here pretty quickly.”

Yoon Hamin looked surprised when he saw me next to Orca, his eyes widening. I smiled bittersweetly and waved my hand while Orca elegantly led the way to the training area.

“Then shall we head inside as before?”

“Thank you.”

And so, my training began once more today.

I trembled at the thought of how desperate the week off would be; I hadn’t even changed into my training uniform yet.

Upon arriving at the training area, I first tightened the black belt around my white uniform and began to move. The uniform fluttered as my body moved.

Then, Orca, who was nearby, sighed and approached me.

“Kanna, didn’t I tell you to warm up before moving like that?”

“Oh, right. I forgot…!”

Realizing my mistake, I moved my body back into position. Then I tried to slowly relax my tense muscles.

What were we supposed to start with?

I’d been to Orca’s house before, but only once, so I didn’t recall the order of the warm-ups.

Pondering with a grimace as I tried to remember, I first did the leg splits that came to mind.

“…Huff!”

Sitting on the cold dojo floor with my legs apart, I desperately caught my breath. Then I worked diligently on splitting my legs.

With my eyes tightly closed, as I stretched until my groin ached, Orca approached me.

Orca grabbed my back.

“Kanna, more, more, more, more.”

“Huff, ah, ah, aah…!”

More? That’s not possible!

Despite my internal shock, I swallowed my tears and stretched my body forward. My stiff body clearly struggled with this as well.

Since I couldn’t move properly, couldn’t use magic, and didn’t know what I could do, I was at a loss.

Remembering that’s why I was in last place made me scream one more time to escape this situation.

Ch. 35 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 35

The warm-up ended.

In the meantime, Yoon Hamin was sitting far away without doing any warm-ups, his head bowed down.

While someone was energetically stretching to the point of feeling a prickling pain throughout their body, seeing someone sitting so nonchalantly made me feel a bit resentful.

“…Why are you just sitting there?”

When I raised my eyebrows and asked, Yoon Hamin hesitated and then slightly turned his gaze toward me.

“No, it’s just…”

I thought I might have asked a bit too sharply, but seeing him struggling to move and sitting there made me genuinely worried.

There was no reason for someone who loved to put in effort and had never stopped to slack off like this.

I ignored the tingling in my groin and stepped closer to him.

“Is something wrong?”

When I asked, Yoon Hamin looked at me with a more horrified expression. Seeing him in trouble, I tilted my head, wondering if it was better not to press him.

“Ah, it’s nothing, really. I’ll just sit for a bit and then go.”

“Got it.”

Since Yoon Hamin said that, there was no need for me to stay by his side. Nevertheless, if he was that troubled, he could at least say something; I was completely clueless about what was bothering him.

This didn’t seem like Yoon Hamin’s usual personality.

“What did he say?”

I felt a bit skeptical, but when I returned to my position, Orca, who had been standing still, tilted her head and asked.

It seemed that Orca also didn’t know why Yoon Hamin was acting like that.

Not knowing myself, I slightly turned my head toward Yoon Hamin and answered.

“I don’t know either… he said to go ahead without him.”

“Is that so? Then let’s continue.”

Orca sighed after looking toward Yoon Hamin for a moment, seeming to be just as puzzled.

Then she stood straight in front of me and lifted her arms slightly.

With her hands gently slicing through the air, she continued her explanation.

“As I mentioned before, there’s something new added during the time Kanna wasn’t around. Up until now, it was just the overturning throw, but this time, it’s a technique to subdue the opponent.”

“Subdue?”

“Yes. Unlike before when someone reached out, this is a technique to subdue your opponent by yourself.”

Hearing that made my head throb.

Utilizing the opponent’s strength to execute a throw was already tough for me, and now I had to move to the next thing without even having tested it in the exam—how troublesome that seemed.

Was it possible for me to do this without even being able to execute a throw?

While I was seriously contemplating this, Orca stepped forward.

“Let’s take it easy; would you like to try it yourself?”

“Uh, I’d like to ask for a demonstration.”

Was this what it meant to get stronger through hits?

Hearing that made me tense up, and my body stiffened.

At that moment, Orca’s foot came rapidly forward.

The sound of her bare foot hitting the dojo floor pierced my ears.

And before I could react, her body brushed past me.

Just as I reacted with surprise, something snagged on my foot.

Then my vision spun, and I saw the dojo ceiling before I knew it.

“Gah, huh?!”

I inhaled sharply and almost screamed, but Orca’s hand tightly grabbed my collar.

Thanks to that, I avoided the misfortune of hitting the back of my head on the floor.

Still, I couldn’t escape the pounding of my heart.

“Ugh… th-thank you.”

Finally relaxing from the fact that it wouldn’t hurt, I said that while brushing down my chest.

However, just as I finished speaking, Orca’s hand released me.

Although it wasn’t a very far distance, the shock from hitting the floor made me squeeze my eyes shut.

“Ugh!”

“Kanna, do you understand a bit now?”

“Ow, ugh… w-what…”

I rubbed my aching head as I got back up.

After sniffling, I tried hard to remember the answer to Orca’s question.

“…I stepped on your foot, and then I pushed you back with my strength, right?”

“That’s correct. Now you need to do the same.”

Orca praised me for getting the answer right.

Yet, I didn’t feel particularly happy. The reality that I had to use that technique myself was starting to feel rather daunting.

“Okay, get up.”

As soon as she said that, a hand extended to help me up.

I took that hand and quickly stood up.

“Let’s try it. I’ll stay here. It’s important to be successful at least once.”

“Okay…”

Feeling a bit overwhelmed, the one phrase “just don’t resist” gave me a sliver of hope.

“I’ll do it?”

“Yes, anytime.”

At the moment Orca nodded, I moved my feet and approached her side swiftly.

As our bodies crossed, I hooked my right foot behind her right foot. Simultaneously, I put my right arm around her collarbone and pulled her in front of me with strength.

Then I saw her silhouette tipping back.

I felt joy at the thought that I had succeeded, but the first thought that came to mind was, “What if she falls to the floor?”

The reason I wasn’t falling to the ground was that Orca had grabbed the collar of my uniform.

Then, I…!

I grabbed hold of her tightly.

Her body that was tipping over paused in mid-air, but my arms couldn’t hold out.

Eventually, I lost my balance and fell over.

“Ugh?!”

Thud, my knees hit the ground.

In the midst of that, I felt proud of myself for not colliding with Orca.

“Ugh…”

Tears welled up in my eyes.

Gasping, when I barely managed to open my eyes, Orca’s face was right in front of mine.

I thought I was going to lose my breath.

“…Kanna, could you move aside?”

At those words, I couldn’t say anything and just put strength into my arms to move aside.

I rolled half a turn on the ground.

I felt so awkward I thought I might d*e.

If I hadn’t been caught, I would have slammed right onto the floor, but since I was caught, my arms lost strength and created this situation.

Feeling embarrassed, I buried my face into the ground and whimpered softly.

“You did well for the first time. Next, how about sparring with Yoon Hamin, thinking of him as a student who is trying hard not to get thrown easily?”

Orca stood up, shaking off her body.

I took a glimpse of her and then turned my gaze to Yoon Hamin.

I thought it might be better to practice with Yoon Hamin. After cooling my flushed face, I got back up.

“Yoon Hamin?”

After standing up, Orca tilted her head while looking at Yoon Hamin, who was still sitting and hadn’t gotten up.

Yoon Hamin hesitated for a moment, and only then did he finally get up.

Orca sighed and pointed at me behind her.

“Yoon Hamin, would you spar with Kanna?”

“…Uh, uh-huh.”

Hearing his somewhat unenthusiastic response made me feel like he didn’t want to spar with me.

If he was to fight with me, all he had to do was act as a training dummy or adapt to the situation, which might be bothersome.

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

“No, I’m fine now.”

I said that out of consideration for Yoon Hamin, but he shook his head, as if to say it wasn’t an issue, and approached me.

I straightened my uniform and stood in front of him, tilting my head slightly.

The opponent I was facing was someone taller and heavier than me.

Thinking like that, I pondered what to do.

I wondered if I could trip someone that big, and if I couldn’t push him, that was another issue.

“Then let’s get started?”

“At any time.”

I envied his confident voice.

I was trying hard to become like that.

“Huh!”

After shifting beside him, I hooked my foot behind his back foot simultaneously with my shout.

But as expected, his body stood firm like a tree and showed no intention of moving.

I raised my arms as much as I could, targeting the upper part of his body, but even that didn’t work, and I felt a bit discouraged.

I wondered if I could strategize this and felt my mouth dry.

Seeing me in such a predicament, Yoon Hamin seemed to want to comfort me and said,

“Kanna, I’ll show you first; do you want to follow my lead?”

“…Isn’t it just following what Orca said?”

“It’s different when dealing with someone big.”

After saying that, Yoon Hamin stood in front of me.

I felt there might be another method to spar, and when I stayed still, he moved slower than Orca.

As his foot stretched behind me, it came around in an arc to strike my knee.

While I was caught off guard, my knee was tapped, and at the same moment, my strength gave out and my vision dropped.

“!”

An arm caught my body that was losing its balance.

As I tipped backward, due to losing my balance, I couldn’t resist it.

As I swallowed hard, my body was about to fall backward.

If Yoon Hamin hadn’t gripped my collar to hold me up in the middle of it…

“I think I understand?”

“In short, you mean to hit there.”

“…Uh-huh.”

Wondering if I mistakenly said something, Yoon Hamin’s gaze suddenly shifted toward me.

I was curious where he was looking while speaking, and when I looked down with my gaze, as Orca had pulled it once, my uniform had loosened and exposed part of my chest.

“Could you let go?”

“Ah, sorry…!”

Yoon Hamin immediately let me go.

My body fell straight to the floor.

The only relief was that the distance between me and the floor wasn’t too far.

I groaned at the shock that flowed through my body.

And there was Yoon Hamin, feeling sorry and not knowing what to do.

“Ugh…”

“A-are you okay?”

Just a moment ago, I hadn’t felt pain from this level of damage, but suddenly, I couldn’t adapt to why it hurt so much.

While I was groaning, my body resonated eerily.

“Ugh.”

I let out a small groan, and Yoon Hamin, worried about me, suddenly stood up.

Orca also hurriedly got up and looked around.

“Yoon Hamin, this impact is…!”

“Must be another monster.”

At their voices, I groaned softly.

The fear engraved in my body trembled fiercely.

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“…Ugh.”

As I groaned softly, Yoon Hamin, who was next to me, finally looked at me.

“Kanna, are you okay?”

“Uh-huh.”

My body was aching, but I was somewhat better and pushed myself up from the floor.

The loud vibration felt like it was trying to pull my body down to the ground.

I couldn’t understand why the monsters were coming so frequently.

I didn’t want to accept it.

It reminded me of the incident with the monster from before, and my body stiffened instinctively.

I was so scared of things I wanted to forget coming back to me that I squeezed my eyes shut and hugged myself.

Even though I thought I shouldn’t look strange, the trauma accompanied by pain resurfaced and rendered me unable to move.

I don’t want to be dragged away again.

The thought that I didn’t know when I would be pulled back to the cave outside the barrier made me shiver.

Frowning, I stopped standing and settled back down on the ground.

“Kanna…?”

“Kanna-ya?”

Yoon Hamin and Orca looked at me with strange expressions.

“Ugh!”

Before long, Yoon Hamin suddenly lifted me up.

My body seemed to fly into the air for a moment before landing snugly in his arms.

“Uh, uh…? Uh-oh?”

Flustered, I froze, unable to say anything and just hesitated.

Before I could grab onto anything, Yoon Hamin turned to Orca.

“Orca! We need to move Kanna to a safe place!”

“Wait a moment…! The device is… where I left it…”

Yoon Hamin said this and exited the dojang, while Orca turned to find her belongings and the device.

In that brief moment of just the two of us, Yoon Hamin spoke to me.

“I’m sorry for suddenly carrying you… I thought you might be scared because of that incident before.”

Without a chance to resist or say anything else, I tightly kept my mouth shut after hearing his words.

He was the only person in the Academy who knew my situation, and since he was considerate of me, I had no choice but to rely on him.

Right now, it was impossible for me to move on my own.

Yoon Hamin ran somewhere holding me.

If I were to think of the safest place here, there were only a few options besides the Academy.

Furthermore, when I thought of where I could go, there was really nowhere other than the Academy.

I wondered if he was really planning to run to the Academy and glanced up at him.

"…Yoon Hamin."

"What is it?"

I pondered for a moment. But that thought didn't take long.

"…Please don't tell anyone that I was taken by the monster."

"Understood."

Yoon Hamin immediately nodded at my words.

Before I knew it, we had run for some time, and Orca had caught up behind us.

It seemed like Yoon Hamin hadn't sped up for my sake.

In an urgent situation like this, we ran without even a moment to change into our training uniforms and faced the servants.

But before that, Orca's voice approached first.

“Yoon Hamin! You and I received a summon from the Academy!”

“Really?”

“I think we should leave Kanna in the care of my family’s servants and move.”

At that, Yoon Hamin hesitated for a moment, then stopped in front of the servants.

After hesitating once, he glanced at me.

Well, if it’s hiding in the Lamiris family, wouldn’t that be okay?

I thought that, but Yoon Hamin seemed to think differently.

“…I think we should change our clothes first before thinking about it.”

He seemed to be contemplating whether he rushed out unnecessarily thinking we had to head to the Academy.

In fact, if there hadn’t been a summons from the Academy, I could have just stayed hidden under the protection of the Lamiris family for a while.

Yoon Hamin turned back again.

*

Changed into the Academy’s uniform, I didn’t even have the leisure to tie my ribbon, shoving it into my pocket instead.

My legs, which had been shaky just moments ago, had recovered enough for me to stand properly.

I could walk, but running would be another matter.

Yoon Hamin, ready to head to the Academy after changing his clothes, hesitated for a moment before looking back at me.

He had a slightly worried expression about leaving me at the Lamiris mansion.

“…I’m okay. I’ll stay here.”

I couldn’t become a hindrance on the way for no reason.

“Yoon Hamin, hurry.”

“Okay. I’ll come back once I’m done.”

Yoon Hamin said this and turned on his heel.

It seemed he couldn’t easily lift his foot, perhaps worried about me.

I didn’t want to make him worry that much, but I couldn’t help but think that I might obstruct his path to becoming a hero.

I waved my hand to send him off.

*

The moments spent training in the dojang kept swirling in my mind.

Groans and chests, experiencing them one after the other made my mental strength feel foggy, or maybe it diverted my focus.

In any case, I had gone through a somewhat eventful training, but it was for a short while.

After all, the monsters, which had not come before, started to break through the barrier continuously after the first time they did.

At the same time, Kanna, who was rolling on the ground, was groaning.

It wasn’t the stimulating groans I had heard earlier but rather the truly agonizing sounds.

For a moment, a fleeting thought passed through my mind—Kanna, wearing bl**d-soaked clothes, dragging her feet towards the barrier.

The voice that had claimed she was taken by a monster echoed in my head.

Then, I began to realize that this was due to her trauma.

I wanted to help her somehow, but I couldn't do anything at all.

"…"

I had no choice but to leave her at the Lamiris family.

It wasn't entirely due to my lack of ability, but still, it weighed on my heart to leave her alone.

I didn't distrust the Lamiris family, but thinking of being dragged away by a monster inside the Academy didn't leave my mind at ease.

I wondered if it would be better to keep her visible.

But having already come this far, I could only head toward the summoned Academy.

While running quickly, Orca asked from behind.

"You don't have to worry. The Lamiris family manages the barrier, so the mansion is meticulously maintained too."

"That's true, but…"

Isn't it the same for the Academy?

Even back then, no matter how much confusion there was due to the monster's invasion, it was a moment when many heroes had gathered there.

Rather than not being able to trust someone, it was more about being fearful of the monster's actions.

“I don’t know.”

No matter how often I repeated my worries, no one could predict how things would turn out in the future.

The hero observation rights given to students ranked at the top.

It was undoubtedly a good opportunity, considering that experiences couldn’t be bought with money.

Even if I disliked it, if I ranked high, I would have to accept it almost forcibly.

Arriving at the Academy, I followed the teachers’ guidance and the footsteps of other heroes.

It was fortunate that I got to handle monsters that I had learned how to address due to Kanna, but my consciousness was still on Kanna, whom I had left behind at the family mansion.

“A little one, huh?”

A woman with blue hair and blue eyes, exuding a refreshing impression, stood holding a sword.

The hero looking at me and saying that seemed to embody the ideal hero everyone desired.

“…Yes, I’m Yoon Hamin, here for hero training.”

“Really? You know this is all practical training, right?”

“Yes.”

She swung her sword a few times in the air and smirked.

“Nowadays, monsters don’t mimic the shapes of animals, so be careful, okay? Just follow along.”

“Yes!”

I drew the sword at my waist and followed behind her.

Monsters have cores, and a new monster that shattered the understanding that you had to destroy them to defeat them appeared.

However, once you know the method, it could surprisingly be dealt with easily, so I could try it out as practical training.

I gathered my strength to cut off the flow of magical power.

The ability to draw from the properties of stars felt truly like a blessing, as it was versatile.

Emitting light, along with condensation and explosion.

If I wished, I could even raise the temperature.

I swiftly drew a line with the sword, and a line of extreme heat traced across the monster’s body.

With the explosion, the monster staggered.

The fact that it didn’t cut well made me clearly understand why the magical power pass was in place outside.

If I hadn’t known this method, I would have had to struggle to pierce through the monster’s body that couldn’t be cut and break the core inside, likely leading to my d*ath.

While having such chilling thoughts, I was also faced with a reassuring situation.

“Hey, what grade are you in?”

My mentor hero asked me with a smirk at the corner of her lips.

Watching a monster collapse with a thud, I turned my head at her question.

“I’m a first-year.”

“…A first-year? Still green, huh? That’s a good future! Are you the top student?”

“Yes. I am ranked first, although I missed it once.”

I answered with a bitter smile.

I felt like I had said something that didn’t need to be said, but still, I thought it would be good for future mentors to judge based on this much.

The hero in front of me pondered over my words and said, “Hmm.”

“My name is Sel. With your caliber, you could probably join our faction later. What do you think?”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Okay, think carefully.”

She said that and turned to deal with the next monster.

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The star was enormous, yet conversely, it was also a small dot. After stabbing the dots with my sword, I violently pulled it back as if it were tied to something somewhere.

As I twisted my wrist like turning a key, the dots I had made instantly connected.

The lines connecting the stars formed a constellation. The constellation soon turned into a single sword line, slicing through the body of the monster.

Due to recoil, I couldn’t cut deeply, and because of its regeneration ability, I couldn’t inflict fatal wounds, but I had to be satisfied with the fact that I could cut the visible path, even if just for a moment.

Seeing the monsters staggering one by one gave me a sense of accomplishment.

The hero, my mentor, Sel, gradually reduced her assistance and soon quietly watched as I held on by myself.

From a distance, I saw her inserting her sword and clapping.

“Wow, that’s really impressive. You’re on par with active heroes.”

With a swish, I swung the sword a few times in the air before quietly sheathing it. I needed to move to the next location.

“Senpai, where to next?”

“Over there, we need to handle things while getting closer to the barrier. There have been a lot of issues with the barrier lately. Are the managing families not doing anything?”

At the end of her pointing hand, I saw the bodies of monsters that couldn’t even be concealed by buildings. There were even monsters in the shape of birds crossing the sky, making it feel like experiencing the end of the world.

Crash! Boom!

As the monster’s body collided with a building, it crumbled helplessly. Monsters the size of a person were frightening, but seeing a creature resembling an elephant was utterly terrifying.

Fwww!

The massive trunk was raised toward the sky, then it let out a sound like a trumpet.

“Well, at least that one takes the form of an animal.”

Hearing that did not make me happy at all.

It was overwhelmingly preferable to think that, rather than trying to break the core of the large monster, it would be better to k*ll it by slicing through the outer parts.

Even so, I wasn’t stagnant. A hero does not choose their enemies.

“You know?”

Hearing her voice, I replied calmly.

“Yes, the first priority is lives, and the second is exclusion.”

“That’s correct.”

Upon hearing those words, I dashed along the straight path.

There were too many monsters. I knew I would have to brace myself for countless monsters rushing in the moment the barrier opened, but at this rate, it seemed I wouldn’t be able to cope.

No matter what, there would be limits to what I could solve alone.

*

“Evacuate here!”

“Yes, yes!”

Guided by the servant, I ran quickly.

Being a guest of the Lamiris family, I felt a bit of relief that they were taking care of me, but my anxiety was growing, making my heart race.

Following the directions, I got into the car, and it sped away to the opposite side of the collapsing barrier.

I bit my nails. My body ached, and I involuntarily frowned.

I felt uneasy not knowing what the monster might do next, and I could not predict even a moment ahead.

“…Huh.”

I groaned softly and squeezed my eyes shut against the jolting impact. The servants sitting next to me in the passenger seat were no different.

The man in a suit beside me, tensed up, cautiously asked, “Are you alright? You’re our lady’s friend, right?”

“…Yes.”

“We’re heading to a bunker established by our family. Don’t worry. Also, we have separate floors, so you won’t run into the head of the family. You

can relax.”

“Thank you.”

I didn’t know what else to say, so I merely nodded.

The luxurious interior of the car was filled with a smell of distinct opulence. However, since I was just sitting as a guest, I remained stiffly sitting without leaning back against the seat.

Having encountered such a situation, I realized that high-achieving students must engage in hero practice during emergencies like this, regardless of holidays.

Seeing the monster rampaging was quite troubling, but there was nothing I could do, so I just felt anxious.

While the car was speeding along the road, suddenly, there was an impact.

Boom! The car must have struck something, and my body was lifted. Since I wasn’t leaning against the backrest, my face slammed into the passenger seat.

I was sure hitting my face would hurt, but the pain I experienced was far worse than I imagined.

“Cough!”

In the event of a significant accident, I was overwhelmed not with thoughts of what happened but solely by the deafening noise covering my ears.

The car crumpled. It was so badly dented that I couldn’t tell the front from the back before the engine exploded, and I was engulfed in scorching heat.

“Hah, ugh.”

It felt like my insides twisted. My stomach churned and flipped. I felt like I might throw up.

I opened the crumpled door and threw my body out. At that moment, the car exploded.

“…Hah, wait a minute…”

Just a moment ago, there had been nothing. I was told to run opposite the monsters.

So why was there a monster here?

Thud, I collapsed onto the ground, supporting my upper body with my arms and lifting my head. There, a dark purple monster was staring at me with gleaming eyes.

I recognized this monster. It was one I had seen before.

The monster that had eaten my arms and legs many times.

“Oh, oh… just, wait… please…”

The monster was looking at me with shining eyes. It tilted its head as if it had no interest in the burnt corpse.

I felt as if my breath was being cut off. Trembling, I had no clue what to do.

I couldn’t think of any solutions.

My legs, which had walked well enough a moment ago, were now pressed between the seats, leaving me unable to stand.

And at that moment, a beak approached me.

No, don’t. Don’t do it.

The school uniform of the academy that trains heroes caught the attention of others. It symbolized that I would soon be one to protect humanity.

If others saw me now, I wouldn’t have any words to describe how bleak this future felt.

Still, I was fortunate that no one was around as it was a path to the bunker of the Lamiris family.

But, unhappily, all the servants in the car with me had already died.

I couldn’t protect them. It was an unanticipated ambush; my only reaction was to crawl on the ground.

“Grr…”

The monster stood still, seemingly contemplating what to do with me.

Or perhaps it was waiting for the monster’s command.

And as that thought turned out to be correct, the creature revealed itself behind the monster.

“Hey, you’re doing well?”

My eyes widened at that figure. The creature approached me, grinning.

Having tormented me thoroughly before sending me off, the creature that returned was incredibly repulsive.

“By the way, you’re listening to my words well, aren’t you?”

“…What?”

“The part where I told you not to make a fuss.”

As her cold voice approached, her foot lightly crushed my outstretched hand.

My brow furrowed involuntarily.

I knew the monster was strong, but I had no idea it could attack so frequently.

It was difficult to estimate just how much power it possessed.

It was as if it was showcasing even the power it would bring forth in the later parts of the story now.

Should I conclude that it had all been prepared from the beginning?

“W-what do you want…”

Barely supporting my downturned head, I trembled as I lifted my gaze. The creature crouched down, still stepping on my right hand.

Then it just stared at me quietly.

“Just?”

“……”

Just.

That was a truly monster-like statement.

It must be bored. It must be lonely.

Unable to endure such a life, it sought to fill it with the screams of someone else.

Thinking that the monster would likely chew on my limbs again in the future filled me with fear.

However, the monster did not do that.

“Really just?”

Since I was afraid, it seemed to be reassuring me, just like that. The red gaze embedded in its black eyes pierced into me.

As I flinched and lowered my gaze, the monster seemed to enjoy my reaction and chuckled softly.

“How cute. Really cute. Just stay hidden like that. Don’t let anyone see you, don’t disrupt anything, stay still.”

Finally, it patted my head once and left. I was left abandoned on the ground.

It could be considered fortunate to be discarded by the monster, but in a situation where I couldn’t stand on my own two legs, I had no idea what to do in this desolate place.

Maybe I should hope that someone related to Lamiris would find me on their way to the bunker.

I was resigned to waiting for help, lying face down for a while, when a sudden thought crossed my mind.

“……Ah.”

Could it be that they are testing whether they can find me right away…?

It wasn’t entirely impossible. Considering that they found me in this desolate place, one might even say there’s a chance.

So I trembled.

Not able to stand on my legs, I only buried my head into the ground and swallowed my tears.

I was scared.

So very scared.

If the monster and the creature could find me, then wouldn’t it be disrespectful to rely on anyone at all?

“…Someone, please save me…”

At this rate, perhaps it would be better to just commit s*icide.

I had nowhere to escape.

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The asphalt ground was extremely cold. Even though I wanted to get up, my legs were in such a mess that I was unable to rise, and I had to clearly feel the chill.

The heat from the burning vehicles after the explosion was intense. Even though I wanted to escape, I couldn’t get away on my own, and I was even frightened by the possibility of sparks flying at any moment.

The smell of burning corpses was unpleasant. It smelled similar to grilled squid, but it was a much more putrid odor. I had to say it was a smell that made me involuntarily frown.

“…Ugh.”

I had been lying on my stomach for minutes, maybe even hours, next to it. Overwhelmed, I rested my forehead on my arm and drooped my head low.

I felt like I was going to d*e from the increasing difficulty, but I couldn’t organize my increasingly depressed thoughts, so I just continued to stay like this.

The sun, which had been high in the sky a while ago, had tilted and cooled down chillingly. There were no vehicles passing through this area.

I thought that if even one representative from the Lamiris family passed by, it would somehow work out, but given the situation, it seemed there were no vehicles passing by in this place.

If there was someone who had gone in before me, they wouldn’t come out after seeing the monster nearby, and if they were coming up behind me, they would have turned in another direction.

I squeezed my eyes shut.

I don’t know how much time passed like this. The Device by my head buzzed with a low hum. I lifted my head and opened my eyes wide.

“…!”

I groaned at the contact from Yoon Hamin.

While I was rolling on the ground and stuck in despair, that was the moment the answer I had contacted earlier came.

I should have been happy, yet I hesitated to pick up the call. I worried that everything I was trying to touch might break due to the fact that the monster could come looking for me.

If just being nearby brings danger, then no one would want to be close to me.

I trembled. And just when I thought the call would drop, I answered.

“…H-Hello.”

[Hello? Kanna, you contacted me…! Where are you? The B?]

“Ugh…”

The moment I received the call, all my previous worries seemed to vanish, and an emotion surged up.

Unable to hold back the tears welling up in my eyes, I let them flow freely onto the asphalt.

Yoon Hamin silently listened to my voice, then called me as if in a dilemma.

[Kanna?]

“…Ugh.”

[Kanna? Aren’t you in the B…? Where are you right now?]

In response to his voice, I barely managed to open my mouth with a trembling voice.

“I… I…”

Surely the monster wouldn’t come right away. So, it should be fine for now, right?

I also worried that thinking so selfishly might be wrong. But it was too cold and lonely right now. I was shivering at the thought that I wouldn’t be able to receive help from anyone, wanting to escape from the overwhelming despair.

“Here… I encountered a monster on the way and… had an accident…”

I barely managed to answer in a stuttering voice. Then, I heard the sound of breath catching on the other end of the Device.

It seemed the fact that I had run into such a situation shocked him.

[…Where? No, you don’t know exactly where, do you?]

“Uh-huh…”

[Got it. I’ll meet up with Orca and ask. Is there anyone around?]

“No one, is… there.”

[Okay, just hold on for a little while, really just a little.]

Upon hearing that voice, I hesitated for a moment and then answered that I understood.

The call ended abruptly, dragging me back into the cold space.

Lying on the ground, I could only blankly stare at the screen of the Device. And quietly, while looking at it, I clenched my hand tightly.

My breath shuddered.

After all, it seemed like I wouldn’t be of any help at this rate, and if I continued to live on, I might just cause more harm, so maybe it would be better to d*e alone? That thought kept swirling in my head.

“…….”

It was truly painful.

Feeling utterly powerless, I thought that I would do more harm than being useful.

Whether this was okay or not was uncertain. Even if someone could know in advance and offer protection, the people who fled there might get swept up too.

Even if I could run away alone, the monster would eventually find me.

Seeing that it had found its way to this desolate place, where no one else passed by, there was no doubt.

“I’m scared…”

Being chased by the monster was terrifying. Having limbs torn apart by the monster was a struggle. Being hit repeatedly by someone’s aggression was a painful experience.

But when I think about how scary that is, and how being alive would only bring trouble to someone else, I’d think that I should just commit s*icide, yet dying was also frightening, leaving me at a loss of what to do.

Some say that living on is worth it, while others choose d*ath, saying it’s much better than living.

There must be someone out there who harbors the desire to live a better life. And then, I guess they despair at the fact that their wish won’t come true.

Should I be like that too?

Should I despair? Or should I hold out hope?

As I spent time blankly pondering that, someone’s footsteps approached, chilling my whole body.

Under the darkened scenery, I heard Yoon Hamin’s voice.

“Kanna…!!”

Even with his calling voice, I could not rise to greet him. I could only shiver like this as I welcomed him.

“Hello…”

“W-What happened? How did the monster get this far? W-What happened?!”

Yoon Hamin came closer and pulled me up into an embrace, lifting my upper body. With his arms serving as a strong support, I sat weakly on the ground and looked into his eyes.

I trembled my lips at those words.

How much should I talk now?

I had to share a story no one would believe, and that made me hesitate in fear.

I hesitated. I needed to say that the monster had come to find me, and it had left without killing me, but that would surely sound like nonsense to anyone else.

And then Yoon Hamin reminded me of what he had told me.

“…I said I would believe everything.”

Hearing that voice made me open my mouth. Then I closed it again.

My hesitation didn’t last long.

“The monster came looking for me.”

It seemed Orca hadn’t arrived yet. I wasn’t sure if someone was following or if only Yoon Hamin had come first.

Regardless, I was just relieved that anyone had come.

“…The monster came with a monster, but then just turned around. I couldn’t move my legs after the accident and had to lie here…”

I said that while looking away. There were three corpses left in the completely burnt vehicles. It was quite evident that the monster had targeted only that spot.

Yoon Hamin groaned as he looked at the wrecked vehicles.

“Is it a monster that the heroes missed…?”

“No.”

I shook my head.

“The monster came to catch me, so it wasn’t an accident.”

“What?”

Yoon Hamin’s eyes widened in surprise. There was a look of confusion in his gaze.

To him, I cautiously prodded.

It was the moment when I finally arrived at the answer I had been continuously thinking about in my despair. A way to end this moment easily

and simply.

“Long story short, I told you before that I was taken by a monster.”

“Yeah.”

It was a story I began on my own, but Yoon Hamin silently nodded as he listened. I felt a firmness in his voice that indicated he had already decided to believe me.

“At that time, my limbs were severed. Honestly, you expected that, right? That part was stained with bl**d.”

He didn’t respond to the question and just hung his head. I continued to reveal the next part of the story to him.

“They were cut off, but they grew back. It seems something strange was implanted in me by the monster.”

I said that while smiling at my own absurdity.

His pupils trembled violently. It felt like a wave of emotion crashing against me. Despite facing that, I didn’t lose my smile.

It wasn’t a joyful laugh. It was a self-deprecating smile, and also a forced smile to swallow this tear.

“It feels like the monster senses something from me and comes to find me. I have limbs now, but it might not just be a problem with the limbs. If it can track me down accurately to a place like this, maybe my whole body is strange. I might be in trouble.”

I tried to pour out everything I knew to Yoon Hamin, who couldn’t seem to find his voice.

But that kind of talk couldn’t continue.

“What do you mean by that?”

“…I mean, the monster is probably keeping an eye on me constantly.”

Although I had said I would believe everything, he still couldn’t help but feel some doubt.

If he didn’t understand that, he would certainly be a selfish person. I added an explanation to that.

“It means it can find me anytime, anywhere. If I say I’m weak and shelter with a lot of people, those people could also be in danger. What do you think?”

At my words, Yoon Hamin ground his teeth.

“So what are you trying to say…”

He probably sensed the mood already.

I made a wish to him.

“You know.”

If you’re quick-witted.

“Please k*ll me.”

I’m sorry, but I don’t have the courage to d*e alone, so I’ll ask like this. I’m so scared that I can’t endure it.

As I swallowed my tears and said that, Yoon Hamin frowned.

“Because the monster knows your location, you’re saying that the person next to you might be in danger, and you want me to k*ll you?”

“…Yeah.”

At that answer, Yoon Hamin raised his voice angrily.

“Of course, that’s a statement close to that of a hero…! It might even be considered correct! But can’t you selfishly say that you want to live at least once? Can’t you ask for help like that…!”

I trembled at his voice.

“I don’t want to get taken… I don’t want to feel pain anymore. I’m scared, I… I’m scared…”

A scenery that I could momentarily forget began to unfold. The time spent with the monster inside the cave wouldn’t leave my memory, sending shivers down my spine.

“So please…”

“No.”

Yoon Hamin coldly rejected my request.

“No one will let you d*e.”

His golden eyes glowed brightly against the night sky.

“Even if it’s you.”

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“…….”

I was silent and couldn’t say anything.

Having come to Yoon Hamin’s house by chance, I squatted in a corner of the sofa, observing the surroundings.

Whether it was my muscles being shocked or something being wrong, I couldn’t walk properly. I had no choice but to go wherever Yoon Hamin brought me, so I could only sigh.

Feeling a bit guilty about bringing me to his house against my will, Yoon Hamin placed a glass of water in front of me and said,

“…I’m sorry for bringing you here without permission. But I thought you needed some time to clear your head.”

Time to clear my head? Did I really need that?

If a monster decided to attack right now, I was afraid that the person next to me would be in danger because of that.

And I was scared of being dragged back into a cave again because of a change of heart from a monster.

Even if I took time to think, it wouldn’t change the answer since my mind was already made up.

It mostly consisted of thoughts that dying might be the best option for both those around me and myself.

However, Yoon Hamin was determined not to allow me such thoughts and kept me here.

To be honest, the reason I hadn’t asked him to k*ll me was because I was afraid to take my own life.

Deep down, I wanted to keep living here, so that feeling took priority.

So if no one killed me, I simply couldn’t d*e.

“Taking time to clear your head…”

I accepted the cup and stared blankly at the water inside.

Yoon Hamin quietly watched me gazing at the water and then cautiously sat next to me.

“Is it really true that the monster can find you?”

“Yeah.”

I answered briefly and gulped down the water.

The thirst I had was somewhat relieved.

I let out a small groan at the cool sensation running down my throat.

“…Well, it’s not completely certain, but I should say it’s almost confirmed…”

“Is that so?”

Yoon Hamin answered like that and leaned his upper body forward.

He clasped his hands together, bowed his head, and seemed deep in thought.

Not long after, he came to a conclusion.

“But you still don’t have a reason to d*e.”

The conclusion that followed his small murmuring voice made me drop my gaze.

I could feel my lips burning at the sight.

I didn’t want to d*e either, but when I thought about the pain I would suffer if I lived, I couldn’t help but think that dying might be a release.

So, wanting to live was no different in the end.

Like others, if I had strength, I wanted to fight, and if I didn’t, I wanted to flee.

If only I could desire my future like that, I would be content.

I was empty because I couldn’t do that.

I chose the lesser of two evils because I hated the worst.

That was all there was to it.

“Is that so? But if that happens, the people around me will also be in danger.”

I grasped the cup tightly in both hands.

The water inside the cup swayed heavily, mirroring my unsettled heart.

“As long as I’m within this barrier, there’s nowhere to run… In the end, thinking about how I’ll be dragged away and suffer, dying quietly without harming anyone around me is…”

“I don’t want that.”

I spoke the thoughts I had mulled over while lying prostrate on the asphalt just after the accident.

But Yoon Hamin shook his head, saying he didn’t want to hear such things.

When I slightly turned my gaze, there was Yoon Hamin, sighing and sitting up straight.

He had pondered something, but he seemed to think my words weren’t worth considering as he shot a cold gaze toward another direction.

Of course, by the time that gaze turned to me, it had transformed into a gentler one.

“I don’t want to hear it. As I said earlier, what you talked about must have been a heroic story. But there’s no reason to do that.”

Yoon Hamin said quietly.

“You’re not a hero. Neither am I. We’re just students of the Academy.”

Hearing his voice that declared I didn’t need to act heroically even though I aspired to be one, opened my eyes wide in surprise.

The ‘Yoon Hamin’ I knew was vastly different from the one in front of me, and I felt a shiver at that realization.

It contrasted sharply with the image of him moving forward, insisting that he had to act like a hero even though he wasn’t one.

“…You.”

“Of course, Kanna, everything you said is absurd and unbelievable. No one around you will trust you. There’s no evidence, and it’ll only be something they remember once it hits them directly.”

The living room was dim, and maybe that’s why his eyes seemed to shine even more brightly.

I was the one who had asked him to believe me.

I sometimes thought it was unavoidable not to, considering I had said such things and expected to persuade him.

Yet he continued to insist he would believe me.

Once, his faith wavered, but in the end, he sent me unwavering gaze right before me.

Ironically, it was my gaze that was shaking, wanting him to believe me.

“…No one else will believe you. That’s unavoidable. But I believe you.”

Yoon Hamin said that and clenched his fists tightly.

I placed the cup on the table and clasped my hands, trying to calm my tumultuous feelings as if washing them.

I didn’t know what to do with myself. It seemed Yoon Hamin wouldn’t give me a moment to think.

“What I saw doesn’t become false. Sure, maybe it differs from your timeline, and I wondered if you were just guessing, but thinking it through, it seems you’re mostly correct.”

He furrowed his brow, recalling something.

Feeling the awkward atmosphere, I inhaled sharply and straightened my back, resting my arms on my stretched legs.

“Even the day you returned with bl**d on your hands and today when you were lying on the floor for hours because a monster chased you—it’s not all lies, is it?”

“Is it not…?”

“So, I believe. Because I saw…”

Yoon Hamin trailed off, placing his right hand over my left.

But, still…

“If you believe me, doesn’t that make it even more important for you to listen to me? You wanted to become a shining hero more than anyone.”

His words made Yoon Hamin’s gaze waver.

It was the first time his steadfast eyes showed any sign of instability.

“How that—”

“I’m asking this because you believe me.”

I said quietly.

I didn’t long for heroism.

A hero was someone who threw themselves into saving someone else.

While they were meant to save both themselves and others, if that became impossible, they should prioritize sacrificing themselves.

I thought that was outstanding, but I didn’t desire to live that way.

Still, this was only because I was selfish.

It was just a desire for my own peace of mind.

If I was going to have to endure it anyway, and if I was going to be dragged and suffer, then it felt better to d*e quickly rather than struggling and getting innocent people hurt.

If someone died because of me, I could easily collapse under the words ‘It’s your fault.’ or ‘If only you hadn’t existed.’ before I was dragged away.

Right now, walking on a carpet made up of laughter, neglect, and contempt in the Academy was already exhausting, and I felt I wouldn’t be able to bear

it if even those looks permeated my daily life.

Thus, I wanted to reduce my own suffering and mental anguish.

“A hero? No, I said that for myself rather than for others. Isn’t that selfish? You can be disappointed when you realize I’m not as upright as you think.”

I followed up with a self-deprecating smile.

“…I’m sorry.”

But it didn’t last long before I apologized to him.

“Being selfish… I’m saying this to you. I don’t want someone to d*e because of me, and I don’t want to be dragged away either. So, I thought it might be easier to d*e before I suffer any more.”

My voice trembled.

It was inevitable.

I was prepared for d*ath, but my resolve wasn’t that strong, so my heart quivered.

Yet, if Yoon Hamin, who dreamed of being a hero,

if he wished to become the brightest star in the darkest sky, wouldn’t he listen to my words, even if it was m*rder to him?

It would save many lives if he did, so wouldn’t he?

But he didn’t.

“You’re really selfish.”

It felt like a critique.

Though his tone or manner of speaking didn’t convey that.

He just calmly seemed to agree with my words.

I closed my mouth bitterly.

“You once said you wanted me to smile, so why are you preventing me from doing so?”

Upon hearing that, I felt a lump in my throat.

That was a half-hearted comment, made because I couldn’t talk about the despairing future approaching Yoon Hamin, and I never imagined it would be returned to me like this.

“…I respect that you’re trying, and even if others don’t believe you, you’re attempting to address the problem one way or another. I think it’s amazing that you don’t give up.”

Yoon Hamin tightened his grip on my hand.

My left hand felt a light pressure.

“Don’t be afraid. One day everyone will understand. So, it’s okay to be a little selfish. It’s okay to hide. It’s okay to run away. You’re not a hero yet, so it’s fine. They’ll understand.”

Yoon Hamin said this several times to reassure me, as if to say it was alright.

“You don’t have a reason to d*e. No matter how elusive the monster may be, even if it knows where you are hiding, if you can stop it before it reaches you, isn’t that alright?”

He wore a refreshing smile.

“Otherwise, I’ll protect you.”

“Heroes don’t prioritize who to protect.”

I chuckled in disbelief at Yoon Hamin’s words.

But he seemed serious, not turning his answer away.

“What do you mean? Of course, heroes have precious people, that’s only natural.”

“I’m not one of those precious people.”

“…What do you mean—ah.”

Yoon Hamin halted for a moment.

The living room fell into silence.

In the suddenly awkward atmosphere, my hands felt a little restless.

Realizing I had been too immersed in the atmosphere, I stammered and opened my mouth.

“…Forget it, can you let go of my hand?”

“Sorry.”

Yoon Hamin jumped and released my hand.

I checked the time with the device I took out from my blazer.

It was 2 AM. It was too late.

There was no helping it. I had been rolling on the floor for too long, then got caught by the Lamiris family, shared my circumstances briefly, and Orca resolved it. Eventually, I ended up here having this conversation; of course, this was how time flowed.

“It’s too late. I think I should go.”

As I put the device in my pocket and tried to stand up, Yoon Hamin stopped me.

“No, sleep here.”

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I felt like my brain froze at the suggestion to stay over for the night.

To think they want me to sleep here.

Honestly, it’s not that it’s impossible, but it’s so sudden, and I don’t have any spare clothes here, making it a bit awkward.

Yoon Hamin’s house isn’t too far from mine, but it’s not exactly close either, so I was unsure if I could make it back home on this leg.

It was a series of awkward situations.

At times like this, isn’t it better just to slip away?

“No, it’s fine. Staying here would be a burden… Ugh!”

As I tried to get up to leave, the pain that shot through my thigh made me stumble.

When I crashed my knee against the table in front of the sofa, it hurt so bad that I nearly cried.

But I didn’t just throw myself onto the table.

“…Ah.”

I sighed softly.

Yoon Hamin jumped up and caught me, preventing my fall.

As I sweat and glanced at the table I nearly collided with, I turned to look at Yoon Hamin, who was awkwardly standing there, holding his stomach.

Finally regaining my balance, I groaned softly and sank back into the sofa.

After letting out a small groan, I looked at Yoon Hamin, who had set me down.

He looked at me and said quietly,

“Look at you. Where do you think you’re going with a body like this? You might still have aftereffects, so you should rest a little.”

“…I don’t have any clothes to change into?”

“I can lend you something simple.”

Yoon Hamin said that and cleared his throat.

“…….”

My school uniform was a bit dirty since I had been lying on the floor.

It seemed it was time to put it in the laundry.

I had too many worries and too much to think about.

Yoon Hamin silently watched me for a moment before going into his room.

He returned with short sleeves and shorts and handed them to me.

I took them and looked at them for a moment before letting out a small groan.

Since I didn’t have the strength to go home, I thought I might as well accept them and tightly held onto the clothes.

“The shower is over there.”

“Ah, okay.”

I nodded.

Having decided to accept his kindness, I checked the bathroom he pointed to.

First, I should wash my dirty body.

After that, I would tidy up, and by the time I was ready for bed, it would probably be around 3 a.m.

I felt my body tiring.

Entering the bathroom, I took off my clothes and glanced at the mirror before wetting my dirty body with warm water.

The shower head hanging from the rack poured down like rain, hitting my shoulders.

So I’m resting here. As I idly thought about it, suddenly my body relaxed, and I felt all my strength drain away.

I thought standing wouldn’t be an issue, but as my muscles relaxed, I felt like the floor was pulling me down.

Ah.

I just want to close my eyes like this.

I was left pondering what I could do now.

Even if I can see the future with my abilities, since it isn’t a true ability, I couldn’t predict the future that keeps changing in real-time.

So there were limits to what we call abilities.

There were already too few usable events remaining from the changed branches, so it was something I could let go of.

“…Ugh.”

My vision blurred.

The fact that the monster was watching me felt terrifying.

Thinking that my limbs would be crushed by the monster’s beak, I couldn’t help but shudder at the thought that my chin would be distorted enough once the monster’s finger collided with it.

Now the only thing I knew was the information about the monster and that it could find me.

I couldn’t know where it was or what it was doing, so I could no longer discuss when the barrier might break.

The possibility of arousing more suspicion was even greater, but still, some things just can’t be done.

My vision faded more and more.

As the tension eased, my strength to hold on disappeared.

The vision that kept lowering fell straight to the floor.

With a thud, my body took a hit, but I didn’t feel it clearly, and simply closed my eyes.

It felt strangely like collapsing on the floor on a rainy day.

*

Kanna Aurora was struggling with all her might.

Whether there was something she could see or feel that only she could, watching her run around with determination somehow made me think she

was truly amazing.

Nobody believed her, thinking it was too absurd, but she didn’t feel despair.

Could she be seeing the future? But it didn’t seem like she was.

She had foretold one incident, but she couldn’t predict the events that followed.

She said the barrier would break, and it broke at a time different from what she had mentioned.

The monster arrived, and because the proper countermeasures hadn’t been put in place, many people nearby had died.

At the same time, a monster that had never appeared before invaded the academy.

A monster that didn’t resemble any animal I had seen before appeared there.

But even that could find a way to survive thanks to a single word from Kanna.

I didn’t know what Kanna was seeing.

Even if I asked, I doubt she would provide a proper answer.

So all I could do was believe in her.

If I had listened to her words, I could have prepared.

I recalled the things I could have prepared thanks to her words.

Kanna’s voice, asking to be killed, still echoed in my ears.

“…….”

The vehicle fleeing to the Lamiris family bunker had been caught by the monster, and Kanna had been left lying on the floor for hours.

I couldn’t tell how complicated her thoughts had been during that time.

The image of her crying, saying she didn’t want to be dragged back and suffer again, pricked my heart.

Her limbs had been severed and regenerated.

The monster had given her something, and because of that, she could be found.

As I laid out such facts, I groaned.

But before my thoughts could deepen, I heard a loud sound from the bathroom.

Startled, my shivering shoulder jolted me awake.

I lifted my head and ran right to the bathroom, knocking on the door.

“Kanna? Kanna!”

I banged on the door.

“Kanna, are you okay? Are you washing up?”

I pressed my ear to the door to listen.

But there were no voices, just the sound of water pouring down.

I knocked on the door once more, but there was no response.

“Kanna! I’m coming in…?!”

Honestly, I knew it was wrong to barge in if she was washing.

But I couldn’t just leave Kanna lying there, so I tried to rationalize it in my mind.

It was not an unusual thought; it was something I had to do to save Kanna.

Grabbing the locked doorknob, I twisted and put some force into it.

Wondering if a light force wouldn’t be enough to open it, I held my breath.

I put my thumb on the part where the key goes in the doorknob.

I made a point and imagined the explosion of a star.

With a sound like something bouncing, the doorknob shook.

The broken doorknob lost its power and opened the door for me.

After passing through the changing room and opening the door, I saw Kanna, who seemed to have collapsed while showering.

Seeing Kanna, who was not wearing anything, I hesitated for a moment, then frowned and approached her.

I turned off the water and gently tapped Kanna’s cheek.

“Kanna, wake up!”

Even after doing that, her eyelids remained closed, showing no signs of movement.

Sighing softly, I quietly looked at her and pulled down the corner of my lips.

“…Kanna.”

I called her name in a slightly trembling voice.

I gently wiped her somewhat dirty face with my wet hand.

Then I took her out.

*

Someone was laughing. Someone was laughing.

Every time a tooth was pulled, someone was laughing.

It felt like even if I ran away, it would still be in their palm.

No matter how much I struggled, it seemed to say I couldn’t escape from this fate.

If there’s a predetermined fate like in a novel, and if it applies to me too, I began to wonder if there’s really a reason for living.

The future I knew now held no value, and it was impossible to mumble about knowing the future.

The knowledge I had was about monsters and beasts that hadn’t yet appeared, but I feared being suspected for mentioning it.

So my struggles became meaningless as I just wandered the floor.

I don’t want this. I want to live.

I don’t want to suffer.

I want to change this desperate situation.

The future I have to face, and the future Yoon Hamin has to face.

If it’s not impossible, then I don’t want to run away.

“Ahh, ahhhh…!”

I screamed, disliking the nightmare that kept trying to drag me into a swamp, and I raised my body.

As I pushed myself up with my arms, I recognized the scenery I had seen before.

My heart raced.

And in my dazed mind, I repeated to myself.

Is there really nothing I can do?

With my knowledge, even if it’s not to the extent of knowing the future, I should be able to make deductions, right?

So…

“Are you awake?”

There was definitely something I had been thinking about, but that voice erased everything.

I jerked my head toward the source of the voice and saw Yoon Hamin squatting next to me, just waking up.

“…Huh?”

Was he sleeping next to me?

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I turned my head to grasp the situation.

First of all, I was in Yoon Hamin’s room. I could tell that easily since I had been in his debt before.

I could understand that I was lying on the bed, but it felt a bit strange that Yoon Hamin was lying next to me.

The sensation of the clothing wrapping around my body felt awkward. It wasn’t the texture of the school uniform I was wearing but rather that of a regular short-sleeved shirt and shorts.

I covered my chin and chest with my hand. The plush feeling of the short-sleeved shirt pressed against my body.

Had I lost consciousness? I began to wonder if I had fainted while wearing this outfit or if I had lost consciousness while washing up. And soon, as the thought arose, I felt my breath catch.

“…Did you see?”

In truth, I couldn’t know for sure. It was close to guessing, but Yoon Hamin, as if unable to betray his conscience, immediately revealed his expression in response.

He blinked, looking surprised, and fidgeted, tossing glances around.

“No, it’s just… I guess I have to say it was unavoidable. You fell over so suddenly while you were washing…”

There was no need to insist on what I might say, that was when I saw my body. So, seeing him make excuses like a guilty person, I could only smile bitterly.

“It’s fine. You were helping me, right?”

“Uh, uh? You’re not mad?”

“Why? Did you want me to be mad?”

“No…! I just thought you would be mad.”

Yoon Hamin waved his hand. Seeing him like that, I let out a deep sigh.

I had collapsed while washing up, and not helping me would be a problem, so showing my n*ked body was better.

“But…”

I felt around my upper body with my hand. Naturally, there was no bra in place.

However, as I explored lower down, I slightly pushed my hand under the shorts and felt that there was underwear intact.

“…I didn’t expect you to touch this far.”

When I glared at him with narrowed eyes, Yoon Hamin immediately rose upright and knelt.

“Sorry. I was worried you might be uncomfortable…”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

I decided not to press him any further, as he probably hadn’t done anything inappropriate. Just the fear I felt the moment I stood up chilled my body,

causing my nerves to naturally focus toward that direction.

With my mouth tightly shut, I lowered my gaze, stopping my trembling hands to form a tight fist.

Yoon Hamin, sitting beside me, tilted his head at me.

“…Kanna?”

“No, no.”

I turned my head away.

I wanted to tell him it was nothing, but perhaps my reaction had already revealed everything, so Yoon Hamin cautiously got off the bed.

“If you’re going through something difficult, at least tell me.”

Hearing that voice made me smile bitterly.

“I already told you, but you said you wouldn’t listen.”

“That can’t happen.”

His serious tone made me feel that continuing these kinds of conversation wasn’t a good thing.

Still, there was a part of me that thought if I truly became a threat to humanity one day, he would have no choice but to k*ll me, so I didn’t want to pressure him or push him into a corner of choice.

“I know, I know.”

Having answered so coolly, I lowered my head and continued in silence. Eventually, Yoon Hamin dusted himself off and got up, turning to change the atmosphere.

“Let’s have breakfast. I’ll make it for you. By the way, Kanna, are you someone who has breakfast?”

I tilted my head at his voice. I thought about whether I usually had breakfast, but since I couldn’t recall ever eating breakfast before school, I instinctively shook my head.

“No, I usually don’t eat.”

“Really? I’ve heard there are a lot of people like that nowadays.”

Yoon Hamin continued the conversation naturally. However, he didn’t say what would he do then. It seemed he was planning to have breakfast with me today.

I knew Yoon Hamin was good at cooking, but I didn’t expect to run into him so quickly, making it feel somewhat sudden and remarkable.

Feeling hesitant, I moved my legs, which had improved a bit, and got off the bed.

“Oh, be careful. You might still have some aftereffects.”

“No, I’m fine. I can get up.”

Even though I had collapsed in the middle, I was the one who had stood up while showering. And if I remained idle like this, how would I be able to go to school?

“By the way, today is Sunday, right?”

“Yeah, so?”

Having been caught up in an incident while training at Orca’s house on Saturday and ending up at Yoon Hamin’s house, today was indeed Sunday.

That meant tomorrow was Monday, and all I had done over the weekend was practice body techniques. Even that practice had been cut short, leaving me without any results.

Thinking that I wouldn’t be able to study properly and would end up failing the exam this week made me feel anxious.

I shouldn’t be here on a Sunday; I should have memorized a bit more at home, so why was I still here?

I should return home. I had thought to say that to Yoon Hamin. But in the end, I couldn’t bring myself to say it.

Just like before, the fear that continuously conveyed itself to me hadn’t left.

I was afraid that if I returned like this, once again the barrier would collapse and that the monster would come looking for me again, causing my breath to tremble.

I felt guilty for relying on Yoon Hamin, and I wanted to avoid being a burden to Orca, but the need to survive kept pulling me here.

Even while thinking it shouldn’t be this way, I was acting selfishly.

“…No, it just suddenly came to mind.”

I muttered and lightly brushed over this situation. I needed to go back, but I was afraid to do so.

Of course, breaking down barriers takes time, so if I took some measures I wouldn’t have to confront the monster. However, when that moment actually came, there was nothing I could handle, and I felt nothing but an overwhelming sense of powerlessness.

I was dazed and let my head droop.

Ever since I encountered the monster, lying cold on the floor and just waiting to send an SOS request felt incredibly pitiful. I hesitated to leave this place, wanting to avoid experiencing such an encounter again.

“I need to study too…”

I hesitated.

I wanted to scream for help. My desire to just stay here was growing stronger.

So I cautiously opened my mouth.

“Um, you know…”

“What?”

“Could I stay here for a little while?”

I felt sorry for Orca.

But thinking that I could d*e before then, I couldn’t afford to make concessions.

Once the barrier was broken using the totem, the monster would immediately release the monsters and take the opportunity in the chaos to come looking for me.

I was only lucky this time. This was only a step to check if the monster could easily find me with whatever it had implanted in my body.

As long as the totem existed, the monster that could invade as if wandering into its own room, having something planted within this barrier, could do anything when it returned next time, making the uncertain future feel frightening.

Wishing to avoid that, if someone was beside me when the incident occurred, wouldn’t I have a little chance of survival? Wouldn’t I be able to avoid being dragged away?

The monster breaks down the barrier to find me. It keeps me alive to achieve some purpose.

Just that fact made me feel scared, and I didn’t want to leave.

Orca would understand me. After all, I had been horrifically injured to a degree I could hardly attend the Academy once, and I had twice

encountered the monster when it broke the barrier and came charging in.

While I could view pushing such explanations on someone as somewhat selfish, I still wanted to act selfishly this time.

It wasn’t that I wanted to become a hero; rather, I simply wanted to live a life free from pain.

Yoon Hamin looked at me with wide eyes.

It seemed he never imagined I would make such a request. I smiled bitterly and opened my mouth to explain.

“Um, it’s just that I only have this school uniform, and I need to wash it, and I have to study too. It’s, like, a mess.”

I worried I might look a bit strange rambling like this by myself, so I dropped my head low.

“…I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s about what happened yesterday, right?”

Yoon Hamin waved his hand at me.

“It was sudden. First, let’s have breakfast and talk.”

Then, he readily nodded to my question. I felt a bit guilty for relying on his kindness.

Having thought to act selfishly, I felt guilt when things flowed in such a way.

But it wasn’t bad. It was better than returning home alone, better than being alone at home.

“…Thank you.”

I quietly expressed my gratitude. At that, Yoon Hamin smiled sadly.

“It’s nothing. I just think we shouldn’t have parted like that back then, that’s all.”

He seemed to regret leaving me alone when he exited the mansion. That wasn’t Yoon Hamin’s fault, and it wasn’t even the fault of the servants in the mansion.

If we were to pursue fault, it lay with the monster, and I had to bear the responsibility for the deaths of the servants.

I sealed my lips tightly. Then, I looked up at him, who was speaking as if he were blaming himself.

“Anyway, you said you got called to gather everyone, right?”

“…Well, that’s true.”

Yoon Hamin scratched his cheek at that, and soon seemingly lost his words and began to move. As I watched his back as he hurried towards the kitchen, I remained dazed for a moment before letting out a sigh.

As long as I was beside him, I could survive. That fact seemed to bring forth a sigh of relief.

I didn’t know how long I could continue living like this.

Ch. 42 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 42

Yoon Hamin went to the kitchen, and I was left awkwardly in Yoon Hamin's room.

What I was wearing was a neat short-sleeve shirt and shorts that Yoon Hamin had laid out for me to change into after he washed them yesterday.

The problem was with the underwear above, and in fact, the underwear below was also an issue. With nothing suitable to change into, I had no choice, but it felt a bit ambiguous to stay like this, so I stepped out.

As I came out of the room, I saw Yoon Hamin in the kitchen connected to the living room, wielding a frying pan and moving his hands around.

He started to fry something with oil, and as I passed by, he felt my presence and turned to look at me.

"…Oh? You should rest a bit longer."

"I just wanted to check my uniform."

Unable to speak frankly, I awkwardly smiled and pointed to the bathroom. Yoon Hamin seemed to understand and was about to let it go, but then he suddenly turned off the light.

"By the way, Kanna, didn't you say your uniform needs to be washed earlier?"

"Oh, yeah. That was the only one I had."

As I nodded, Yoon Hamin temporarily stopped cooking and came over to me.

“Then follow me this way. I’ll show you where the washing machine is.”

“Thank you.”

Nodding like that, I followed him.

Yoon Hamin strode over and swung open the bathroom door at the end. Unlike my small studio, which was very nice, there was a separate dressing room next to the bathroom for changing clothes before entering.

As I entered, what I saw lying there was my uniform and the bra on top.

I had come to put that on, but I had been tempted by the mention of washing my uniform, which led to this situation.

Should I say I was too careless? No, wait a minute, I definitely hadn’t left it like that.

“…Yoon Hamin.”

“Oh, no! I’m sorry!”

While I lost my mind, he had even put underwear on me, which was both a relief and awkward, but seeing this situation made me feel a bit heated.

What should I do with this?

I groaned softly for a moment and then grabbed Yoon Hamin by the nape of his neck and pulled him out.

“Come on.”

“Ugh.”

Yoon Hamin, letting out a small groan, didn’t resist and was dragged out as I pulled. As I pushed him out, I held my temples and groaned for a moment.

It would be weird for two guys to show each other their underwear, so why was this happening?

I swallowed my bitter feelings and brought the bra that was awkwardly lying on top of my uniform to my body. After confirming that everything was nicely tucked away, I opened the bathroom door again.

There stood Yoon Hamin awkwardly.

“…Is it done? Tell me again.”

In the slightly cold space, I opened my mouth first, and I could see Yoon Hamin’s gaze drop slightly.

“……”

His gaze felt a bit too direct.

Of course, I understand that people instinctively wonder where something has gone if it disappears when they were there. But having those eyes on me felt a bit too disrespectful, so I waved my hand in front of his gaze.

Yoon Hamin flinched in surprise.

Then a soft groan escaped his lips.

“Ah, sorry.”

“It’s fine. This…”

“I’ll tell you!”

The washing machine was here, but it wasn’t the type I knew; it was a front-loading washing machine, so I felt a bit awkward about how to use it.

I’d figure it out quickly by pressing a few buttons, but with the homeowner right next to me, I couldn’t just press buttons at random, so I quietly waited for him to tell me.

Yoon Hamin wandered around like someone who didn’t know what to do, then finally told me how to use the washing machine.

But after explaining everything, he said this to me.

“…By the way, you should just dry-clean the blazer.”

I raised my eyebrows at that.

If that’s the case, you should have told me that first. That thought came to me first.

Trying to calm myself down and swallow my frustration, I took a few deep breaths. Then Yoon Hamin seemed a bit anxious and cautiously continued speaking.

“L-Let me take care of the blazer, and you can throw the shirt and such into the washing machine.”

“Got it.”

The good thing was that the washing machine had a drying function. This way, I could wear it the next day if I washed it today.

I replied like that, sorted the items to wash, and handed the blazer to Yoon Hamin.

“But how will you handle the blazer?”

“I have a dry-cleaning machine at home.”

“You have everything, don’t you?”

I muttered like that as I exited the bathroom.

Yoon Hamin grabbed my uniform and headed to another room. It seemed like it was a space used as a clothing room.

Once we entered, I saw him open a coffin-like square machine and carefully place my uniform inside before closing it.

“Done. You should be able to wear it tomorrow when you go out.”

“Thanks. But can I go eat and drop by my house later?”

“Why?”

“I’m just going to grab my bag and some clothes…”

“Ah, sure! That’s fine.”

He said that and headed to the kitchen, and I remembered he had said to eat breakfast. I followed him, lingering behind as we continued the conversation.

“…But you know, I feel really bad asking, but could you come with me?”

“Uh?”

“I’m a bit scared…”

“Oh, right. It wouldn’t take long anyway; let’s do that.”

“Sorry for being a hassle, thank you.”

I forced a smile to express my gratitude. Yoon Hamin waved the frying pan as if it were nothing.

I quietly watched him. I was curious about what he was making since it was morning.

As a pleasant smell began to fill the air, Yoon Hamin quietly spoke to me.

“Kanna. I just hope you don’t d*e. Still, because you were there, those people could be saved before.”

When he was young, someone died before Yoon Hamin’s eyes.

There was a person dying without any help.

It was Yoon Hamin who vowed that there would be no one like that in the future.

That incident was a driving force that firmly set Yoon Hamin’s two legs in place, and it was a trauma that restrained his heart and blocked him from going anywhere.

So he hoped that the person who could save someone would continue to be there.

If you asked him what kind of relationship that was, it would be hard for him to answer, but since I already knew, I nodded.

“I see.”

Yoon Hamin opened his eyes wide and looked back at me. It seemed he was surprised that I nodded so readily.

No, it felt like there was another reason.

“Why?”

“Um, because you said that yesterday… I thought you’d deny it…”

“……”

I closed my mouth, and Yoon Hamin seemed to have run out of words as well, falling into silence.

The delicious aroma of pasta mingled with the sauce filled the quiet space.

From the moment it settled into the bowl and was placed on the table, there was no conversation between the two of us.

Sitting at the table, I received a fork and blankly stared at it. Then I broke the silence.

“…I was too scared.”

I opened up honestly.

Now, Yoon Hamin and Orca both knew what situation I was in.

Of course, they didn’t know everything.

They only knew that I’d been attacked by a monster and that I ended up like this because of it, but only Yoon Hamin knew the details.

That I had a history of being taken by monsters, and this time, I had come through the barrier to check if a monster might come looking for me.

So this was a story I couldn’t tell elsewhere, and it was something I couldn’t ask anyone else about.

Even if Orca was trustworthy, I had to be careful because I was scared of spreading my story too widely at this age.

Even when I read novels, the character I empathized with was Yoon Hamin, not Orca, so the only one I could fully trust was Yoon Hamin.

So I hoped he would understand. Of course, I didn’t think he would, though.

“I was thinking that if I were taken again, if they were cutting off my arms and legs repeatedly, I would rather d*e than go through that. That’s what I meant.”

I laughed hollowly.

I knew that this wasn’t something to discuss at the dinner table, but once the conversation came up, it was nothing but such stories that slipped out of my mouth.

I felt sorry for putting an extra burden on him who was helping me, but still, I kind of hoped for salvation.

I didn’t want the story of Kanna Aurora becoming a hero or having already become a hero.

I just wanted to dream of tomorrow like someone living normally within this barrier.

I wished only for a life where I could live safely, dream of tomorrow, and draw a peaceful future.

“…I just didn’t want to hurt. I thought I wouldn’t be able to endure it alone, so I thought it might be better to d*e…”

Once I had a place to lean on, I felt pathetic for charging headfirst like that.

I worried that in doing so, I might ruin Yoon Hamin.

I felt anxious wondering if I would ruin his future.

But the fact that I had felt a bit of relief by being next to him loomed larger in me.

I was a very selfish person.

Unlike the hero who should be altruistic, I was just a selfish person.

Ch. 43 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 43

The morning was slightly chaotic due to the bra incident, but that was nothing to worry about.

After hearing Kanna's heavy story, I had no thoughts at all, and I moved my jaw mechanically like someone who didn't even know what they were chewing on while putting pasta in my mouth.

Kanna seemed to be saying she was a selfish person. But when I actually listened, it was such a common sentiment that I tilted my head in confusion.

After all, wanting to live is a desire everyone has, and wanting to avoid pain is completely normal.

If you ask the heroes who are rescuing people, there isn't anyone who wants to d*e, and while some might endure pain, it's clear that no one wants to accept it and live with it.

So, the self-deprecating words that Kanna was sharing didn't need to be self-deprecating at all.

Maybe that's why I unconsciously opened my mouth.

"So what's wrong with that?"

"Huh?"

Surprised by my response, Kanna looked at me with a perplexed expression.

I didn’t expect to be having this conversation while having breakfast. Still, if I could save someone who was suffering enough to want to d*e, it wouldn’t be a bad thing, right?

“It’s natural to not want to be in pain. It’s also normal for things that you can’t stand to happen. It can be so tough that you want to d*e. I can’t fully empathize because you have experienced it and I haven’t, but I can understand it to some extent.”

As I paused my fork and continued speaking, Kanna stared at me with curiosity about what I would say next.

“…So don’t be too self-deprecating. No matter what’s happening to you, if you can stop the monsters from breaking the barrier, you should be able to handle it somehow.”

“How can you stop a monster from breaking the barrier?”

Her voice had grown somewhat cold, and I flinched a bit. Honestly, I had no definitive answer to that, so feeling hesitant was unavoidable.

If it were easy to stop a barrier, there wouldn’t be any heroes. An academy for nurturing heroes wouldn’t exist, and only successful people would stand in high positions managing the barriers.

For instance, like the daughter of the Lamiris family, Orca.

But the world isn’t that simple, and that’s why people needed heroes. They existed because they were needed.

Heroes had to be more altruistic than anyone but also the most selfish.

Others would stop at imagining heroes as purely altruistic, but heroes were inherently selfish beings.

Pulling someone from the brink of d*ath, from a doomed fate, and continuing to survive themselves without any principle of equivalent exchange was their first and final goal.

“That’s something we need to find out. That totem you mentioned before, isn’t it the cause of the barrier breaking? If we can find that, then it should work out.”

As I said this, Kanna bowed her head and twirled the pasta with her fork.

“…If that were the case, there’s no way the barrier would have broken before.”

I found myself lost in thought for a moment, realizing that the instant I told Kanna she had won was a moment I had lost trust.

The monster left the totem behind. I thought that removing it would prevent any further interference with the barrier, but the monster shattered the barrier a week after the moment Kanna had mentioned.

And then a week after that, it struck again.

It seemed it was easier for it to enter because of the totem. Once it got in, it could spread out several of these totems before leaving.

But I wondered how the first intrusion was done.

Was there a spy inside the barrier? Or was it another monster’s doing?

I didn’t know too much. The things Kanna mentioned fell into the realm of things I couldn’t see, despite knowing a good amount.

It was hard to believe, but eventually, I would have to trust. Inevitably, things would pile up until it would be too late to believe.

I faced that reality and opened my mouth softly.

“That’s surely proof that someone is scheming from the inside. But we still have no luxury to find that out, right? So let’s search for the totem that the monster might have left behind this time.”

If we unravel it step by step, we should somehow manage.

It was an optimistic thought. But I believed that since Kanna saved so many lives by knowing the monster's weaknesses, she would be trustworthy.

It was strange that she seemed to know so many things, yet I couldn't possibly think of her as a spy, so I felt I could trust her.

And at this moment, if I thought this method was valid, Kanna would surely nod in agreement.

"Whether you check the barrier like before or investigate the inner part, in a lot of ways, right?"

I shrugged and presented a solution. More than a solution, it was more of a proposal to find an answer.

Kanna sighed at my suggestion and then nodded as if she didn't have anything else to think about.

"…If that's okay… and if that can solve everything… I'd be happy."

"Then would you feel more at ease?"

"I don't know how much effort it would take to feel at ease, but maybe."

Kanna was anxious. I was also anxious.

If the barrier were to be broken again, and a monster came through, it would be obvious that both Kanna and I, and others would be scared.

Furthermore, if a monster came looking for Kanna again, she might give up everything, saying she couldn't do it anymore.

The thought that a monster might drag her away again before she could give up was spine-chilling.

No one would welcome a situation where limbs were cut off and teeth were pulled out, so it was only natural.

I had to prevent a monster from approaching her again. To do that, I had to stay close to her or ensure that the barrier doesn't collapse in the first place.

I needed to ask Kanna herself how to tackle that. Since I had chosen to trust, there wouldn't be any problems.

"Then let's do that. From tomorrow, after the academy's daily schedule, let's look around like this. How does that sound? Is that okay?"

As I proposed this, Kanna nodded.

"Yeah, thank you… Can you walk me home after I finish eating this?"

"Ah, sure."

Now that I think about it, I could offer a solution for this issue somehow, but Kanna deciding to stay over at my house felt a bit awkward.

When I allowed her earlier, it was because I felt that she might crumble at any moment, fearing that she might suddenly disappear, so I didn't want to leave her alone. But now it felt different.

After all, she's a female classmate, and it felt somewhat embarrassing to say she would stay under the same roof.

Of course, I would have tried to stop her if it looked dangerous, but facing this situation now and sorting out my feelings, I noticed they were becoming complicated in another direction.

"Hmm."

I sighed and moved my fork. I continued until all the pasta on the plate was gone.

After finishing breakfast, I picked out my clothes. Of course, since I wasn't going to use any facilities, nor was I going to prove my identity, I had to choose from my casual wear.

Kanna was also in casual wear instead of a uniform, so I thought it would be better to match her style.

After putting on a light hoodie, I noticed Kanna spaced out.

She was wearing a thin T-shirt suitable for her but looked a bit sloppy with baggy shorts. I questioned whether it was okay to go out like that, pondering over it multiple times before shaking my head.

“Kanna, you definitely need to wear something more.”

“…What should I wear more?”

“Just a thicker T-shirt, or something like that…”

“It’s fine since I’ll pack my clothes when I get home anyway.”

It seemed Kanna was rather easy-going.

Or rather, wasn’t she extremely easy-going…?

Considering how embarrassing the incidents of the last couple of days had been, I found it amazing that Kanna was so nonchalantly putting on her shoes to get outside, trying to lighten the heavy atmosphere.

A chilly yet warm spring season.

Honestly, I still questioned whether it was okay to go out in such thin clothing, but I thought it would be fine since she wanted to go out, so I quietly followed behind her.

Walking alongside Kanna, dressed in casual clothes instead of my usual uniform, felt really strange.

“…The weather is nice.”

I opened my mouth, wanting to ease the silence in the atmosphere. Kanna glanced at me and then turned her gaze back ahead, nodding.

“Yeah.”

“By the way, where are you thinking of checking tomorrow?”

I carefully asked Kanna this.

It was a plan that only we knew about, but I felt we should communicate properly even between ourselves. Kanna held her tongue for a moment before finally managing to speak.

“Um, I don’t know. Let’s talk about it tomorrow, for now.”

“Oh, right…”

“I’m not avoiding it; it’s just that I’m feeling a bit chilled.”

“Really? Hang on, do you have a fever or something?”

I panicked. I thought she would just say she didn’t feel like talking, but I never expected her condition to be strange.

“A bit of a fever…”

As I tried to touch her forehead, she lightly pushed my hand away.

“No, that’s not it… I’m just feeling chills.”

“…Kanna.”

I could tell from her expression. She wasn’t sick; she was trembling from fear.

Could I really reassure her? I genuinely wondered about that.

Could someone like me, through effort, erase the deep-seated fear in her heart?

After that moment of worry, Kanna suddenly spoke to me.

“Why do you look so worried? It’s fine since you’re here, so what’s there to worry about?”

No, I’m not omnipotent. Even if I’m the top student in the first year of the academy, I’m not a hero, nor am I the best among heroes.

So don’t trust me too much.

But the fact that you trust me makes me so happy that it seems to stir up contradictory emotions within me.

I smiled unconsciously, as if lying.

“Yeah, what’s there to worry about when I’m right here?”

If I could see her relieved expression like this, I would be satisfied. Still, I wouldn’t stop trying; I hoped she would genuinely feel at ease.

I would do my best to take away her fears.

She just needed to keep smiling.

Ch. 44 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 44

Staying at Yoon Hamin’s house was a bit awkward, but I felt there were more comfortable aspects, so it seemed acceptable.

Staying at someone else’s house was always a burden, but being with Yoon Hamin gave me a sense of security, so I was relieved.

If the barrier were to break down and a monster were to suddenly attack, at least there was someone to protect me.

Even if he wasn’t a formal hero, Yoon Hamin was strong enough not to be looked down upon anywhere, so I could feel at ease.

In the morning, I quickly returned home, and after having lunch, I repeated my studies here.

I did think about practicing body techniques, but due to the aftereffects in my legs, I couldn’t go that far.

Still, I was trying my best to work on my notes, hoping to raise my average a bit.

Who knows, maybe I could escape last place by doing so.

No matter how much they were budding heroes, there would always be a top student and a last place, so the place I could climb to wouldn’t be that high.

Thinking about how I had received a zero due to lacking abilities and interpersonal skills made me believe it was quite possible.

“Ugh, I’m done.”

I stretched as I spoke.

Although studying never truly ends, endlessly repeating it would surely lead to a headache, so achieving the set goal for the day and then taking a break seemed more efficient.

At least that’s what Yoon Hamin said, and I was following along.

As I stretched my tired body and groaned, Yoon Hamin, who was studying across from me, glanced at me.

“…What do you want for dinner?”

“Dinner?”

I tilted my head.

Thinking about it, since it was Sunday, I had even eaten breakfast, which I usually didn’t, so I wasn’t that hungry anyway.

With a blank expression, I put down my pen and shrugged my shoulders.

“I’m not really that hungry. Are you?”

“I’m a bit hungry.”

“Really?”

It seemed like there was a noticeable difference between someone who usually eats breakfast and someone who doesn’t.

“I don’t know. I’m not really starving yet.”

“Then do you want to wash up first?”

“Can I?”

“Yeah, do as you prefer.”

“Then I’ll wash up first.”

I said this and closed my books and notebook, stacking them in one place.

Then, I rummaged through my bag to grab clothes to wear and headed to the bathroom.

I remembered trying to wash here yesterday and fainting.

I also recalled how Yoon Hamin had brought me and laid me down on the bed.

Really, showing my body to someone was always an embarrassing thing, and I felt sorry for making him go through that.

I waited for the warm water from the shower head, wet my body, and washed my hair.

The stream of water falling onto my body felt like raindrops pounding against me.

I faced it and savored the moment, exhaling deeply.

There was a bathtub next to me, but as a guest, it felt a bit wrong to ask to use it.

The amount of water used would surely be considerable, and it seemed like the time spent in the bathroom would be immense too.

“…Ha.”

Still, I felt at ease with the fact that the shower space was spacious.

Looking at the clean tiles instead of cramped, dirty tiles of an old studio bathroom was something I envied.

I thought about how nice it would be if my house were like this.

After finishing my shower, I dressed and came out, noticing Yoon Hamin in the living room with the TV on.

“Uh, uh… Are you done washing?”

“Yeah. It was really nice.”

I flipped my wet hair back.

Perhaps because my hair was so long and thick, the heaviness of it when wet was quite addictive.

Noticing Yoon Hamin’s unnatural gaze, I lowered my head.

I couldn’t comprehend why he was making such a face, even though I wasn’t n*ked like before and wasn’t even wearing a bra.

Moreover, I had dressed properly.

“Aren’t you going to wash?”

I asked while drying my hair with a towel.

At that, Yoon Hamin sprang up.

“I need to wash too. But Kanna, shouldn’t you dry your hair properly?”

“Really?”

“There’s a hairdryer in the changing room?”

“Oh, is there?”

Since I had just changed clothes and rushed out, I hadn’t checked for that at all.

I went back and grabbed the hairdryer that was tucked away in the changing room to dry my hair.

With a loud whirring noise, I held onto the machine and closed my eyes as the hot air blew against me.

After drying my hair until it was fluffy and dry, I was finally able to let Yoon Hamin use the bathroom.

“Sorry for taking so long.”

I smiled awkwardly as I said that, and he waved his hand dismissively.

“No, they say girls usually take long.”

“Really? You seem to know a lot.”

“No…! I just heard it from TV or something! It’s because your hair is long!”

Yoon Hamin stammered as he tried to explain himself, and I had no idea what he was trying to defend himself about.

It seemed like it was a topic that could be let go of if I knew or didn’t know.

I stepped barefoot onto the floor and plopped down on the sofa.

Then I closed my eyes and tilted my head back.

That overwhelming fatigue pressed down on me heavily.

With my body warmed up and not that hungry, I felt I could sleep and wake up now.

“…Umm.”

Yoon Hamin, feeling awkward at my nonchalant response, quietly stared at me before going back into the bathroom.

He could just change clothes in the changing room, but suddenly Yoon Hamin screamed.

“Whoa!”

“What?!”

Startled, I straightened my body and looked at where Yoon Hamin was.

Yoon Hamin opened the door and seemed to want to say something to me, slightly flapping his mouth.

In the end, he closed his eyes tightly.

“Kanna! C-could you pick up the clothes I changed out of…!”

Ah. That’s right, I had forgotten.

Since there was a washing machine in the changing room, it was rare for dirty clothes to come out past that door.

I thought I could just leave them in a corner, but maybe it caught Yoon Hamin’s eye, as I could see his face turning red.

I guess I had become too comfortable while staying at someone else’s house.

“Sorry, I just left them in the corner because I’m going to have to wash them anyway…”

“Oh, no, that’s fine, but can you keep them until today? I’ll bring a new laundry basket tomorrow.”

Covering his mouth with his hand, Yoon Hamin said that.

“…Thanks.”

“No, it was unavoidable, so, uh, sorry for yelling.”

“No, no. I came as a guest, so this is my fault.”

I said this and took the clothes I had changed out of with me back to the changing room.

Yoon Hamin stood awkwardly before locking the door.

*

Seeing Kanna enter the bathroom, I suddenly remembered.

Did I mention she could use the bathtub? Should I say something now?

As I wrestled with this idea, I shook my head, lest I get scolded again.

Remembering how Kanna had moaned when stretching her legs earlier and how I had seen her n*ked the night before made it hard to approach given that she had asked to live together.

Thinking about what she had experienced, it made sense.

If the barrier were to fall one day, a monster could come after her once more, and there was no guarantee I would arrive before the monster, so it was better this way.

I didn’t want to see anyone around me get hurt or d*e.

So when she said she was scared to be alone and that it might trigger trauma, I happily accepted her wish to stay here.

However, I never imagined I’d have to deal with such situations as this.

Kanna came out after washing up, towel-drying her wet hair, and the remaining moisture on her shirt subtly accentuated her figure, creating

steam around her.

Moreover, wearing short shorts made it extremely difficult to know where to direct my gaze.

When it was my turn to wash up and I went in, the sight of her clothes and underwear crumpled on the floor next to the laundry basket made my face feel hot.

“…d*mn.”

No matter how much I tried to carry a sense of duty, I sighed, realizing I couldn’t overcome something like this.

Trying to cool down my warming body, I turned on the cold water, but my heated body seemed reluctant to cool down.

I wished Kanna would pay a little more attention to her actions.

That said, I wasn’t insensitive to the monsters either.

I just wondered if it was only because it was me, or if she treated other guys this way too.

If it was just because it was me, I might feel a little better, but if not, it would be disheartening.

I sighed as I repeated my shower.

The sound of the pouring water was sufficient to mask my turbulent feelings.

Ch. 45 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 45

Time spent with Kanna.

I thought it would be fine if I was just temporarily keeping her for protection, even if she was a classmate girl.

But after realizing it wasn’t that, I could only groan softly.

In fact, if we hadn’t been anything special, it would probably have been just a relationship that flowed like that, but Kanna was different.

Having spent time together closely, I could see her values and thoughts, and it was strongly felt that she was trying to run relentlessly toward her goals.

The thought that I dislike her for not trying was just a quick judgment based on a distant, fragmented view without looking closely, so I felt really sorry when I thought about it.

After realizing that she was struggling but was ultimately stymied by her talent, her environment, and the enemies, I found myself constantly worrying about her.

Of course, that was the first reason I became interested in Kanna, and the second was simply that, as a rational person, my gaze was continuously drawn to her.

Whether we were practicing inside Orca’s mansion, or when I lifted her in the shower last night, I still couldn’t forget that pounding feeling.

Of course, no man would react differently to seeing that, but still.

The fact that Kanna, who doesn’t approach others, was leaning on me like this made me secretly happy.

I realized that just as I said I would believe in her, she believed in me and relied on me.

It felt like the corners of my lips naturally lifted.

I suggested we have dinner to chat, but Kanna, who usually doesn’t have breakfast, seemed a bit bloated after eating in the morning and ended up almost starving before going to sleep.

Since tomorrow was Monday, I thought it might be unavoidable, but I still felt a bit disappointed as I wanted to share a few words.

“Will it be okay?”

I had left one empty room for Kanna, but since my bed was the only one in my room, I felt a bit worried.

I had those primitive worries of whether she could sleep on the floor.

Kanna said she was used to sleeping on the floor, and as she went in, I regretted sending her off like that without knowing how to say anything further.

I took out my device and turned on the screen.

The time was approaching 11 o’clock.

It wasn’t late or early; it just seemed like the perfect time to sleep, yet I simply couldn’t fall asleep tonight.

Maybe because I had just started cohabiting with Kanna, I couldn’t shake off this strange feeling.

The fact that she was under the same roof made my racing heart persistently aware.

I remained blankly lost in thought for a while.

As I stared at the darkened ceiling without doing anything, I heard someone knocking on the door.

The sound of “knock knock” jolted me upright.

“…Yoon Hamin?”

“Uh, um! Why?”

I thought she was just going to sleep quickly, so I was surprised at her sudden visit at this time.

Now that I thought about it, why… at this hour…?

I felt my heart racing inexplicably.

Really, why was she suddenly coming at this hour?

I quickly jumped out of bed and ran towards the door where Kanna was knocking.

As I flung the door open, I saw Kanna looking a bit frightened, sending a trembling gaze my way.

The sight of her glancing up at me took my breath away.

“What’s wrong? Is something the matter?”

“Ah, no… I just felt suffocated in the dark…”

Watching Kanna clutch her chest as if feeling distressed made me feel as if I was struggling to breathe too.

“Come in first.”

I opened the door wide to create space for Kanna to come in.

Kanna nodded and cautiously stepped inside.

After sitting her on my bed, I pulled out a chair from my desk and sat down.

I turned the lights on, and as I faced her, Kanna stole glances at me.

“Sorry for suddenly…”

Hearing Kanna’s trembling voice made me think, was there really a reason to say anything?

She wasn’t saying anything evil to me, and it was because of her trauma, so what reason was there to respond?

I opened my mouth to comfort her.

“It’s fine, really. Are you scared being alone?”

“Uh, um. No, I’m sorry… I’m sorry for being a bother…”

Kanna trembled as she tightly clenched her fists atop her knees.

It was truly sad as I watched her biting her lip with frustration.

Kanna was recalling memories of being dragged out beyond the barrier by a monster.

And now, with the barrier collapsing, she realized that the monster had implanted something in her that could easily guide it back.

“It’s not a bother at all. Since we’re classmates, I can help you with this much.”

I reassured her with words that it wasn’t really hard, that it wasn’t a hassle.

Then Kanna bowed her head for a few minutes before quietly looking up.

Her tearful expression looked truly pitiful.

I wished she wouldn’t cry and that she would smile instead.

“Don’t cry.”

So I gently urged.

It seemed like the emotions she had been holding back burst forth, as she felt a wave of tears filling her eyes.

Those violet eyes, seemingly on the verge of overflowing.

Kanna appeared to be aware of it too, biting her lower lip to stave off her emotions.

She tried hard to hold back those feelings, enduring the urge to release them.

But it seemed like that alone wouldn’t do the trick, and in the end, she let her tears flow.

“I’m sorry… It’s just… I suddenly wanted to stay here with you… and I’m sorry for this… I was so scared…”

“I know, I believe everything you’ve said. Really. I won’t talk about those things like before, and I won’t think that way either.”

“Thank you…”

After repeating her apologies several times like that, Kanna was finally able to calm down.

The time rushed toward midnight.

I realized again how quickly an hour could be gone just by talking with

someone, and instead of feeling complicated about the passage of time, I was busy thinking about how Kanna could truly feel at ease.

Trying to comfort Kanna, I sat next to her and held her hand, but I didn’t even know if this was right, so I remained still.

I just let my body follow the flow, so I could confidently say that I wasn’t holding her hand with any ulterior motives.

“Are

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They say the appropriate amount of sleep for a person is between 6 to 8 hours. So ideally, my goal was to fall asleep around 11 or 12 and wake up around 7, which is also a good habit to improve the quality of life.

However, it wasn’t necessary to fill that time completely to sleep well.

There are people who can live a normal day after only 4 hours of sleep, so in fact, the quality of sleep depends more on how deeply one has slept rather than the amount of time spent sleeping.

In short, even if I had a poor night’s sleep, as long as I managed to get some rest during that short time, I wouldn’t feel tired.

The problem was that such favorable circumstances never happened for me.

No matter how wide the bed was, thinking that Kanna was sleeping in the same bed made my heart race. My consciousness kept drifting to one side, and there was no way to stop it, so even if I shut my eyes tightly, I struggled to sleep properly.

As a result, I woke up in the morning with bleary eyes.

I really messed up. That thought lingered in my mind.

The reason I didn’t have to study late into the night was because I focused mostly on what was taught during class and reviewed it. But now my head was throbbing to the point where I couldn’t concentrate at all during class.

Just the fact that Kanna was sleeping next to me, completely defenseless, was a problem, and sharing the same blanket made it absurd.

Kanna was too carefree; you could say she was completely defenseless.

We were supposed to sleep in the same bed, under the same blanket, but seeing Kanna sleeping so comfortably, unlike me, gave me a sense of disconnect.

Am I the only one aware of this?

Is it just me overreacting while Kanna is completely emotionless?

However, even if she seemed emotionless, it didn't make sense for her to sleep so defenselessly in such casual clothing with a man lying next to her.

I groaned and glanced at Orca sitting next to me. Orca looked at me with an expression of confusion.

"You don't look well; is something wrong?"

"…I guess I just didn't sleep well."

I casually shrugged off the conversation.

Even though my intentions were innocent, I couldn't speak about situations that might seem strange to others.

As soon as the rumor spreads that Yoon Hamin and Kanna are living in the same house, I worried that strange looks would also come from the teachers.

Perhaps that's why Kanna seemed to sleep next to me without realizing anything, and if I blurted out to others, it would be somewhat troublesome.

Turning my head to glance behind where Kanna was, she shot me a bright, sparkling look, indicating that she had slept well without any worry.

After our gazes met, I noticed her tilting her head, so I turned my head back to the front.

Then, Orca let out a sigh.

“The previous incident was merely an accident caused by a monster. The Lamiris family promised to provide support for those who died. I never got to ask how Kanna has been since then.”

Orca held her device tightly and expressed her regret.

With the device and contact information readily available, not reaching out must mean she had her own busy circumstances. Being the child of a good family was quite exhausting.

“She seemed to have a bit of a hard time.”

I mentioned the truth to Orca, but I couldn’t reveal the fact that monsters could track Kanna down.

Thus, when discussing Kanna’s trauma, I had to tone it down significantly.

It’s not the trauma that comes from monsters continually looking for Kanna and dragging her away; it’s just the shock from having been caught up with monsters twice.

What Kanna desired was peace. The barrier must remain standing so she can find stability.

But unfortunately, the people within this barrier still didn’t possess the technology and power for that. The monsters commanded numerous creatures, and both the monsters and the people who summon them were incredibly powerful.

“Is that so? I should ask about it during break.”

Orca murmured cautiously, clearly worried about Kanna. I simply nodded in response.

*

I was scared to be alone in a dark space.

When the monster held me captive in a cave for days before releasing me, the fear that I felt then was absent. But after realizing that the inside of the barrier was not safe either, this fear kept dragging me down.

The barrier could collapse again at any moment, and I feared that through that gap, monsters could come out and find me once more.

If I were dragged back to that cave, memories of what I would have to endure came flooding back.

Even if the physical pain wasn’t present now, thinking about that time filled me with an emotion so fearsome I would never want to return.

It was safe, so it shouldn’t happen again. It must be safe now, it must be peaceful.

I had thought that way, but the trauma that had not manifested began to stir and wreak havoc within me.

In bright places or crowded areas, I didn’t feel anything like that at all, but the moment I realized I was alone in the dark, the thought of those red eyes appearing from behind sent chills through my body.

After arriving at the Academy, I felt somewhat guilty toward Yoon Hamin.

Even though I should be grateful just for him letting me have a room, asking for half of his bed felt like such a selfish act.

Yet, I wanted to alleviate the trauma, the fear, even if it meant being selfish. So I hoped for a little understanding.

Though I knew that was also my selfishness.

Still, thanks to that, I could sleep well. I didn’t have to tremble in fear from being alone.

But the problem was today. Although I had managed to sleep like that yesterday, I felt a little guilty about doing it again today.

I hoped Yoon Hamin was okay with it, but I didn’t want to count on him, thinking it wouldn’t be comfortable for him if an outsider intruded on the bed he could use freely.

“Alright, it’s attendance time~”

The homeroom teacher, Miss Lucia, opened the door and walked in. After calling out the names listed in the attendance book, she shared the announcements.

“You all probably already know, but the barrier collapsed again this weekend. Because of that, the upper-tier students have been summoned for practical training.”

A few students nodded at the teacher’s words. It was precisely the nodding of upper-tier students.

The teacher surveyed their faces before continuing.

“Originally, the curriculum stated that only upper-tier students would be given practical training rights in the first year, but seeing the barrier collapse again within a week, the heroes and teachers decided it is necessary to overhaul the first-year curriculum entirely, given the situation.”

After speaking, the teacher turned her body. Then she grabbed a piece of chalk and began writing on the blackboard.

“From now on, all education related to interpersonal skills towards people is to be suspended. Due to the sudden protests by citizens and the unexpected actions during standoffs with monsters, it has been judged that it is more important to focus on protecting oneself and fighting against monsters.”

Tap, tap. A white line appeared on the blackboard, which was black as coal.

Wait a minute. Did she just say there would be a total suspension of education related to interpersonal skills…?

I became pale. I could hardly believe that something I had just barely practiced—body techniques—had suddenly become useless, and my expression froze.

What was going to be taken out or added, then? Seeing that they were looking for ways to respond to monsters, it seemed I might have been foolish enough to sigh.

Unaware of my feelings, the teacher continued speaking smoothly.

“From now on, history classes will be reduced, and geography lessons will be inserted in their place. Body technique classes will be eliminated, and instead, those lessons will be replaced by practical training. The grades for practical classes will be divided into abilities and magic, while the rest will be calculated along with assessments of field participation.”

Uh, um, wait a minute.

I wanted to internally shout at the teacher to stop.

But since the situation had already unfolded, and I knew she was just conveying the results of a meeting, all I could do was despair.

I wanted to be rewarded for the effort I had put in with Yoon Hamin and Orca over the weekend.

If everyone made an effort and everyone could be rewarded, then no one would have to suffer, right?

It was simply regrettable. I felt guilty for stealing the time Yoon Hamin and Orca had worked hard for.

I never expected it to turn out like this. It shouldn’t have been like this.

Not being able to gauge even one step ahead of the future, I wondered what I should strive for now. I pushed aside my feelings of regret and

disappointment, focusing intently on the blackboard.

I cherished each lost item, added item, and adjusted item as I observed them, swallowing a breath of despair.

I fervently wished that next time, my efforts would yield something. I hoped it wouldn’t just vanish into thin air.

I wished so desperately.

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Korean, Math, Science.

Additionally, History was adjusted, and Geography was added.

Honestly, since I am a hero who must protect people, it is only natural that I should be able to pinpoint my location immediately when a monster breaks through the barrier and invades, so I couldn’t help but think that this was unavoidable.

It’s a bit of a problem that it’s not just general knowledge, but I have to pinpoint specific locations in certain parts.

Written tests turned out like that, and practical training changed to the point where it could be called the worst for me.

The martial arts, which I thought I could turn my grades around with, suddenly ceased, and since it was replaced with field training, I found myself in an extremely difficult situation.

Being at the bottom of the academy was a category that was still somewhat frowned upon even in the world of heroes who could be called professionals.

Each region has its own agency, and it is only natural to want to bring in higher-scoring students to prosper the area in which one lives.

So, even if they are choosing from the lower tier, it is clear they would

prefer to pick someone with a higher score rather than someone totally at the bottom.

Therefore, I didn’t really like this evaluation criterion.

It felt like everything was going terribly wrong, but I was seriously pondering how to avoid giving up.

“…Ugh.”

As I looked at the geography textbook, my head already started throbbing.

To be honest, I was somewhat confident in memorizing this.

Even if I couldn’t manage abilities close to physical skills, this was something that someone with poor memory could memorize if they just took some time.

While I was groaning like that, a shadow approached me.

I raised my head thinking it was Yoon Hamin, but it was Orca standing there instead.

“Ah, hello?”

“Hello, Kanna.”

As I greeted her with wide eyes, she responded in a soft voice.

After meeting on Saturday and parting without achieving any results, the last encounter had ended with an unpleasant sight.

With that in mind, I repeatedly hesitated, not knowing what to say.

The break time was not long.

During breaks, conversations would quickly end as topics flowed away.

Thus, before a brief silence could settle, Orca was the first to speak, as if she had something to say.

“It’s nothing much, but I was a bit curious about how you were doing after that incident?”

“Ah, I’m fine. My legs are perfectly okay.”

I replied to her inquiry by tapping my thigh with my fist.

Whereas before I couldn’t move properly due to the aftermath of the accident, now I felt much better, as my body had relaxed to some degree.

Being able to walk and having walked to the academy on my own was proof of that.

Upon hearing my words, Orca hesitated before nodding.

Since the person concerned said they were okay, she seemed to refrain from commenting on it.

There was no need to ramble about such things in the classroom, and I wanted to avoid making the conversation unnecessarily noisy.

After some hesitation, Orca brought up a different topic.

“Um, it’s a pity that what we learned before has become irrelevant.”

“…Ah, I see. That’s okay! After all, you can’t just practice interpersonal training to become a hero.”

I waved my hand.

Whether she was empathizing with my disappointment over the loss of martial arts training, she wore a sad expression.

Honestly, I never imagined it would come to this, but even so, there was no way to change the present circumstances.

Thus, I simply tried to accept the situation.

Then Orca smiled bitterly.

There was a hint of pride in her smile as she looked at me.

“I think it’s really amazing that you can say that. It’s hard for most people to think that way.”

After saying that, Orca gently grasped her hands resting on her desk and spoke quietly.

“I was worried. After we parted, and with everything that happened, it felt like it was all my fault and my problem…”

Orca trembled slightly.

Her sincere concern made me widen my eyes in surprise.

Since Orca did not know that a monster could find me, it seemed she was burdened with guilt.

If she hadn’t invited me to the mansion.

If she hadn’t left me alone.

Watching her as she seemed to self-blame made a part of my heart feel uneasy.

I wanted to tell her that none of it was her fault.

Honestly, there were many things I wanted to express.

However, there were limits to what I could say, and saying too much could lead to its own problems.

It felt most comfortable to only speak to someone I trusted, so I held my tongue.

If it wouldn’t lead to countless casualties, and in the end, if I and Yoon Hamin wouldn’t end up dying as well, I wasn’t inclined to speak unless necessary.

“No, it’s just that we weren’t lucky. The injuries and deaths caused by the monster are not anyone’s fault.”

I couldn’t speak the full truth, but I could discuss such things.

So I told her to put her mind at ease.

In response, Orca nodded as if she ran out of things to say.

“Thank you for saying that.”

“I-I’m also grateful for your concern.”

With those last words, Orca turned to leave, looking a bit lighter.

Given that she had resolved her guilt and checked on me, it seemed like a natural reaction.

On Monday, there was already a geography class.

It came across as ridiculously daunting to realize that I had to memorize place names by looking at a raw map and memorize the names of special areas referred to by heroes.

Given the situation, I couldn’t complain about it, so I held my throbbing head and filled my notebook diligently.

After barely finishing four classes in the morning, only then did lunchtime greet me.

Holding onto my dulled spirit, I sighed, and Orca approached me first.

“Kanna.”

“Eh?”

As I replied in a dazed voice and looked up, Orca saw my state and chuckled softly before continuing.

“Let’s go have lunch.”

What could I possibly talk about during lunchtime?

Of course, it was a suggestion to eat lunch.

But right now, it wasn’t something I was particularly looking forward to.

The financial aid for April had already diminished significantly due to repairing my school uniform.

Thus, there was no way I could eat properly.

So I shook my head.

“Ah, no. I’ll eat separately…”

“Maybe you want some bread?”

She seemed to be concerned, but why did I feel so strange?

It was a moment where I wondered if I was being overly sensitive.

“There’s a specific reason…!”

I suddenly sprang up and fled my seat.

Even so, I didn’t think it was right to let those who could eat delicious food eat bread from the cafeteria with me.

*

Having taken class beside Orca, I struggled to concentrate and dozed off.

I usually don’t doze off, but today was unavoidable.

Occasionally, Orca woke me up, but even that had its limits, so even when I opened my eyes, it felt like I wasn’t quite awake.

What classes did we have today, and what content did we study?

Even when I tried to reflect on that, my throbbing head seemed to be protesting that I shouldn’t think anymore.

Whenever I felt like I might snap back to reality, Kanna popped into my mind.

What I had seen while tossing and turning at night was Kanna, quietly sleeping beside me under the same blanket, so it wasn’t strange for that image to linger in front of my eyes.

Well, it probably seemed strange enough to others.

Even I thought there was no excuse for it.

I couldn’t say, “I couldn’t sleep because I was excited about sharing the same bed with a girl in my class.”

Guh, I groaned and covered my face with my hands. Then, I moved up and down a few times as if washing my face.

Finally, when I managed to open my eyes, it was already lunchtime.

I could only think that this week’s exam was in the bag.

No, I could always review it when I got home. But wouldn’t Kanna be there when I got home…?

Checkmate, trapped. All sorts of phrases came to mind, driving me crazy.

While I was groaning like that, a voice reached me.

“Yoon Hamin, it’s lunchtime. Let’s go eat.”

I silently nodded at those words.

Then Orca let out a deep sigh.

“You really look dreadful today. Did something happen?”

It was a story I couldn’t share even if my mouth were to burst.

I shook my head, as if it were nothing.

“No, it’s nothing…”

“Kanna said she would go eat first with the others.”

“…What? Huh? Kanna?”

My foggy mind suddenly became clear in an instant.

It was unbelievable that Kanna would suddenly disappear, and I felt it was dangerous, so I looked up.

“Yeah, it seems we have to eat among ourselves today…?”

“Uh, uh oh…”

This can’t be good.

I felt I shouldn’t leave Kanna alone.

Unsure how to express my anxious heart, I finally started moving my feet.

“Let’s go look for her, just once!”

“Y-yeah?”

I woke up my body that had felt tired just a moment ago.

Then I hurriedly moved with a bewildered Orca beside me.

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“Wait a moment!”

Orca called me to a stop. Worried that I had been walking too fast, I halted my steps and turned to look back at Orca following behind.

“Oh, sorry, was I walking too quickly?”

“No, that’s not it…! Why are you looking for Kanna?”

At her question, I paused my actions.

There were so many reasons why I wanted to find her that I was at a loss for how to respond.

After all, she was in such a dire situation that she could say she wanted to be killed.

After all, she was someone who felt scared alone and could barely fall asleep next to me.

But I couldn’t tell Orca anything.

It was all something I was asked to handle personally, and the very act of sharing it with someone was challenging.

So I could only let out a small groan.

After struggling with what to say, I quietly opened my mouth.

“Well, it seems like Kanna has been feeling unwell since she encountered a monster, and it’s dangerous for her to go around alone.”

“…Really?”

No matter how hard I tried to come up with a plausible answer, Orca merely tilted her head at what I said.

“But isn’t there a reason she wants to eat alone? Kanna said earlier that she could walk around alone…”

“You never know. And she might be feeling down since her body techniques suddenly disappeared. She was even happy that her grades could improve after this sudden opportunity.”

“Is that so…?”

Orca tilted her head.

To be honest, I didn’t know why Kanna suddenly chose to eat alone.

That itself made me feel even more anxious.

Orca was staring at me intently while holding her device.

Then she seemed to be trying to contact Kanna from her contacts.

But I shook my head.

“Why? If you want to find her, this is the fastest way.”

“…I already called, but she didn’t answer.”

“Isn’t she just muted because she’s eating in the bathroom again?”

“Why is she eating in the bathroom again, then?”

Orca’s gaze trembled.

“I don’t know… I just thought she was eating like that because she didn’t have any friends to eat with.”

“…It would be better if she at least ate somewhere like that, but why specifically in there?”

It was frustrating.

Why was it that despite having a device, I couldn’t reach her?

Even if she was eating in the bathroom, why was she doing it again this time?

I simply couldn’t understand. She had people to eat with, and as Orca mentioned before, when she wanted to eat snacks from the vending machine, she suggested we all have them together, but Kanna chose to eat separately.

I thought we had gotten closer and opened up more, but maybe that wasn’t the case.

“Still, it might be dangerous like before, so I should search for her just once.”

But if I just stayed still with thoughts like “why” without changing anything, nothing would be resolved.

It would be the same with what I could protect.

So I gathered my hands to search for Kanna, who feared even falling asleep alone.

It was a bit complicated since I hadn’t left any markings, but I thought it would be possible to some extent since we were connected.

Lights in the form of dots appeared between my hands.

Just as I was about to connect them, Orca grabbed my wrist.

“Yoon Hamin…”

Orca’s gaze was somewhat cold.

I didn’t know what to say, but it felt like a look laced with disdain.

Swallowing hard, I loosened my grip, and as a result, the stars between my hands disappeared.

“Everything is fine, but let’s agree not to bring Kanna out like before. Even if you find her, I won’t help.”

“No, that… I’m not trying to bother her.”

“Regardless, there’s a line even if you’re worried.”

Hearing that only made me feel more frustrated.

I wished she would understand why I was so worried, but I couldn’t just take what Kanna had shared with me—her trust—and recklessly share it with a third party.

I felt like I was about to sigh, but I held it back.

I had no idea how to convince her further.

After hesitating repeatedly, I finally dropped my head.

I realized that I couldn’t persuade her with limited information.

“I’m sorry; I might have been too self-absorbed.”

“You thought well. You should also consider how Kanna feels about being in trouble.”

If she really was eating in the bathroom, it seemed unkind for me to pry into something she didn’t want to show again.

I thought I should just assume she would manage well.

Asking why she was eating in such a place could wait until after school.

With a sigh, I turned my steps around.

*

“…?”

In a corner of the bathroom, I took out my device to check the time before stepping out.

Seeing missed calls from Yoon Hamin and Orca made me tilt my head in confusion.

Even Yoon Hamin had called three times.

Yet no texts had come through, making me wonder what he was so curious about.

Or maybe it was something that could only be addressed at that time.

I wasn’t sure, but since I didn’t want to make a call from the bathroom, I threw some useless tissue into the trash and headed outside.

At this time, everyone must have finished eating and returned.

If I timed it right and returned, it would surely look natural.

The moment I stepped into the classroom…

“Kanna.”

Yoon Hamin was silently watching me.

I realized anew that I might be late due to sneaking bites while eating in the bathroom, slower than Yoon Hamin, who was coming back from the cafeteria.

“Uh, why…?”

Thinking about how I hadn’t said it directly but rather conveyed it through Orca made me feel a bit guilty.

As I asked with a slight stiff demeanor, Yoon Hamin let out a deep sigh.

“Why did you eat separately today? We could’ve eaten together.”

“Ah, that’s…”

Yoon Hamin was asking why I went to eat at the vending machine again and if I had eaten in the bathroom.

In fact, even if it was the vending machine bread, if the two of us were together, it would’ve been fine to sit somewhere like the rooftop.

But I didn’t want that.

Just the thought of missing an opportunity to eat something delicious because of me and giving up sitting somewhere nice felt unpleasant.

Especially since I was already indebted to Yoon Hamin.

Yet saying I was eating vending machine bread because I was out of money felt embarrassing.

I thought that even if I told Yoon Hamin I was out of money, he’d probably offer to help, so I hesitated to say it.

I needed help, but I didn’t want to rely entirely on Yoon Hamin.

“It just happened that way… I kind of missed that taste…”

I uttered an excuse that didn’t really make sense.

Yoon Hamin’s expression hardened after that, but I had no intention of bringing up the money issue.

I felt satisfied in suppressing my trauma by receiving help.

“Anyway, did you enjoy your meal?”

I tried to deflect the conversation with a light remark.

Of course, Yoon Hamin seemed intent on not letting it slide easily, staring at me.

But time marched on, and lunch hour had long passed.

After the academy’s schedule ended, I was able to leave as the sun began to set a little.

While everyone was parting ways and going their separate paths, Yoon Hamin and I were walking in the same direction.

Normally, we wouldn’t have walked like this, but since I had left my home and was temporarily relying on Yoon Hamin’s, it felt naturally occurring.

However, if I were to ask if we were heading straight home, the answer was no.

Since we had promised to search for the totem right away, I was just walking to the bus stop towards the barrier.

“Hey, Yoon Hamin, you look a bit tired; are you okay?”

“…Uh, now I’m feeling a bit better.”

Yoon Hamin rubbed his eyes slightly as he answered.

I couldn’t help but worry a bit, as he seemed to have spent all day in a daze.

We reached the bus stop and took a high-speed taxi toward the barrier up ahead.

Just like before, when I had been unsure of where it was and had only vague information about it, it was time to do the same again.

Thinking of all the places where monsters might have scattered their presence, I felt overwhelmed.

But those on the side of offense can specify a location, while those on the side of defense often live in confusion.

The problem was that those trying to defend were more desperate.

As we diligently walked along the barrier, Yoon Hamin suddenly spoke up.

“Kanna.”

“Yeah?”

“You ate in the bathroom today.”

“…Uh, eh? What?”

A strange sound escaped from my mouth, which had instantly stiffened.

My voice, tinted with embarrassment, faded into a whisper.

Even if it became known that I ate in the bathroom, the idea of it being shared by someone else felt entirely different, and it made me uncomfortable.

However, Yoon Hamin continued without a care.

“Are you not eating there because you don’t have money…?”

What he said was exactly what I had promised myself not to reveal.

Ch. 49 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 49

Hearing those words, I couldn’t help but freeze in place. I had promised myself I wouldn’t say anything, yet I found it impossible to understand how he could pinpoint it so quickly, despite my silence.

More than anything, it felt like something was hurting in my heart.

Stories about eating in the bathroom or whether I had no money were painful to hear directly, even if they were near a secluded barrier.

Tears threatened to spill over.

I could feel my eyes welling up.

Then, Yoon Hamin pondered over what he had said and became flustered, waving his hands aimlessly.

“Oh, no! I didn’t mean it in a strange way! I just thought you might need help! It’s weird that everyone is eating properly while you’re eating in a place like that.”

His hands fumbled in the air, seeming like they wanted to reach me but never quite did.

After restoring my twisted lips back to their original state, I glanced up at him once. Then I lowered my head again.

No matter how clean the bathroom was, I didn’t want to eat there.

However, even during meals, the gazes directed at me and the atmosphere implying that it made no sense for me to take up space alone only piled on, making it exhausting. That was the only place I chose to escape to.

Thus, the only place I knew to escape was there, and when I had to eat bread due to lack of money, I often ended up fleeing to that familiar spot.

Not saying anything, Yoon Hamin seemed frustrated by my silence, letting out a “Hmm” before continuing to speak.

“I can eat with you, no matter what you choose. It would be nice to eat cream bread together too. You can’t always eat proper meals, right? It’s not like there aren’t kids filling their stomachs at the convenience store.”

Watching Yoon Hamin go on with his lengthy explanation, I seriously debated whether to feel relieved or not.

I glared at him for a while before turning my gaze away.

“Enough.”

I curtly brushed him off and continued on my path, but Yoon Hamin followed closely behind. He knew we had to go to the same place anyway.

As we walked along the wall, Yoon Hamin muttered in an attempt to soothe me.

He seemed to think I was seriously upset, but honestly, if anyone hears such remarks after eating in a bathroom during lunch, I could guarantee they’d react the same way.

Wait a minute… I must be the only one eating in the bathroom, right? There can’t be anyone like me in the academy, right?

I was sweating nervously.

“Hey, Kanna…”

“…I said stop. Just don’t talk.”

I waved him off sharply. While Yoon Hamin seemed flustered, it felt like he could take a bit of rejection.

Surely he meant to express goodwill and help, but even so, directly saying such things could hurt someone, and I wish he understood that.

We continued in silence, rounding a corner.

Departing from the bus stop, we kept circling an area shaped like a triangle. I realized that doing so allowed me to explore all the barriers divided by the bus stop, so I adjusted my steps.

It was almost time to head home as I returned to the bus stop where I first set out.

As the sun was nearly setting, Yoon Hamin seemed to almost give up on soothing me, trailing behind with his head bowed like a sinner.

“Hey, are you going back now?”

At that, I nodded. Yoon Hamin pointed to where the buildings clustered together.

“Is it okay if I stop by the store on the way back?”

“Do whatever.”

Hearing that, Yoon Hamin nodded, a somewhat serious expression on his face.

Walking silently together, Yoon Hamin began picking up various things at the store. Maybe he had money, but it was surprising to see him easily grab beef and diligently pick out vegetables.

I never had the chance to visit this store, so just picking items seemed impressive to me.

After finishing a quick shopping trip, Yoon Hamin, with his heavy basket, lifted it with both hands.

There was also my laundry basket in there, but mostly, it was food ingredients. I wondered if people generally buy so much at once.

Still, I didn’t want to ask.

I just wanted to think of today as one of those days.

I didn’t want to discuss the bathroom or lack of money this time.

“Kanna, aren’t you hungry?”

But Yoon Hamin seemed different.

He didn’t want to accept that I didn’t want to talk today, casually initiating another conversation, which made me sigh.

I wanted to stay quiet today, but I was hungry, so my gaze instinctively dropped.

In the midst of that silence, I worried that saying I wasn’t hungry would mean I would skip dinner, so I lowered my head.

Of course, I didn’t think Yoon Hamin had that kind of character, but at the same time, claiming I wasn’t hungry felt a bit ambiguous.

I wasn’t the type to eat a lot at once, so after some time, my stomach would growl again, and it was a bit regrettable.

In the end, I averted my gaze from Yoon Hamin and replied.

“I’m… hungry…”

Upon hearing that, Yoon Hamin smiled wryly.

“Then I’ll make you something delicious.”

“Thank you.”

“No, I’m just sorry for earlier.”

As he spoke, Yoon Hamin lifted one hand slightly. A rustling sound hinted that there were tasty ingredients in there.

Feeling hungry, I unconsciously turned my head toward it and made eye contact with Yoon Hamin.

Startled, I quickly looked away. Entering the house awkwardly, I immediately took off my blazer.

“Ah.”

Since it was an important outfit proving my identity outside, even if it felt a bit stuffy, it was essential to wear it. Therefore, as soon as I entered a relaxing space, I would throw it off.

I hung my blazer on the hanger Yoon Hamin had given me and tucked it into the wardrobe.

“Then I’ll go cook.”

“Oh, um. I’ll wash up a bit.”

I replied in a sheepish voice.

Did he mistakenly think I was easy? After saying something like that, did he believe that cooking for me would solve everything?

I glared at Yoon Hamin’s back as he walked away, fuming.

Yoon Hamin seemed to sense my gaze, flinching his shoulder and then looking back.

Along with his gaze, I turned my head and grabbed my laundry basket that I had bought today to put away in the changing room.

This is Yoon Hamin’s, and this is mine.

If I separate them like this, Yoon Hamin probably won’t say anything in the future.

Thinking so, I put my change of clothes in the drawer, neatly stacking the clothes I had taken off into the laundry basket. I intended to do the laundry all at once later when I had time.

I felt my day's routine coming to an end, and my legs, sore from walking all day, trembled as they were enveloped in warm water.

There were things I regretted, and things that made me feel regretful, but eventually, this was a life where I had to aim for tomorrow.

With a monster on the horizon, how much compensation can there be for dealing with sudden actions of someone whose reliability is uncertain?

Calming myself down, I accepted that the cessation of body techniques lessons was inevitable and finished washing my face with cold water before stepping outside.

As it was still spring, I felt a bit chilly at night. Perhaps because of that, steam was wafting off my body.

After thoroughly drying my hair, I put on my clothes and stepped outside.

"Oh, you're done washing? Perfect timing, the cooking just finished."

"…Huh?"

Yoon Hamin said that to me as I had just finished washing up and led me to the dining area.

I carefully sat at the table after moving the towel from my neck, and he extended a hand, grinning.

"Here, eat."

Grilled meatballs? Beef bulgogi? Hamburger steak? I hadn't heard the names, but it was clear by sight that ground meat had been cooked and paired with sauce.

While I stared vacantly at it, I let out a slight sigh before nodding.

“…Thanks for the meal.”

I picked up the kn*fe and fork handed to me, stealing a glance at Yoon Hamin, who smiled back. Then he quietly continued speaking.

“Enjoy your meal. And how about we prepare lunchboxes starting tomorrow?”

“Huh…?”

What about a lunchbox?

“Our academy doesn’t require us to only eat proper meals; some kids prepare lunchboxes, so if we do it together, wouldn’t that be fine?”

“…I don’t know how to cook.”

“I’ll cook for you.”

“I don’t have ingredient money…”

“I’ll just make it.”

What’s with him?

“If you’re saying that out of guilt for what you said earlier, you don’t need to worry about it. I just love bread.”

Cooking requires time and leisure. So to me, a lunchbox was a luxury.

“Plus, with Orca around, suddenly preparing lunchboxes would be strange, wouldn’t it?”

At my words, Yoon Hamin’s expression hardened. It seemed he hadn’t thought that far.

“Just let me eat alone.”

Since I wasn’t looking for sympathy or concern regarding that, I could say it comfortably. Yoon Hamin remained silent for a moment before sighing heavily.

“…I’ll contact Orca.”

“What?”

“Let’s try one day of lunchboxes.”

“W-wait a minute…”

As I hesitated for a moment, Yoon Hamin suddenly stood up. He took out a device and began to make a call, making me wonder if he really intended to say that to Orca.

It seemed like he was doing it for my sake, but I felt too burdened and awkward.

Not long after, Yoon Hamin returned with a grin, relaying the answer he got.

“Orca said she’ll prepare a lunchbox too!”

“…Ah, uh, yeah. I see?”

I truly had no idea how to respond.

Yoon Hamin felt accomplished and began to eat.

Afterward, as I quietly ate, I suddenly thought I should mention something and opened my mouth. I didn’t want a situation like yesterday where I rushed in without warning.

“Oh, right, Yoon Hamin.”

“Yeah?”

“…Can I sleep with you again tonight?”

At that moment, it seemed something lodged in Yoon Hamin’s throat, causing him to cough painfully, unable to respond.

Ch. 50 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 50

A dark and cold place.

What do people generally think of when you talk about it like that?

In fact, such places existed anywhere. But everyone has their own space that they conjure up arbitrarily, don’t they?

For me, that was a cave, and such a space became a trauma, leaving a scar deep within.

At first, there was really no trauma at all.

Initially, I thought I was just unlucky, and I considered it fortunate that the monster had tired of me and let me go on a whim, so I thought I would live carefully moving forward; it was possible because of that mindset.

However, after the barrier fell the second time and I reunited with the monster, being alone in a dark and chilly place became so terrifying and sorrowful that all I could do was shiver.

The cave was dark and cold.

The asphalt ground, shrouded in night, was also dark and cold.

Life, which was nothing but a cycle of solitude, pain, and hunger, was agonizing and unbearable, causing tears to well up. In the hope that someone would come to rescue me, I brought the most trustworthy Yoon Hamin to my side.

When I was frustrated by the many things I couldn’t express, just having someone who believed in me felt like salvation.

“Are you sleeping here again today?”

Yoon Hamin glanced back at me.

I wanted to say sorry, I’ll leave if you don’t want me here, but I nodded my head because I was too scared to sleep in the room he had given me.

“…Yeah, it’s scary alone…”

I said that while tightly holding the edge of the blanket that I had claimed.

As I clenched my fist, the blanket in my hand crumpled.

I sighed, wondering if I was too weak to overcome even this alone.

Yoon Hamin let out a sound, an odd half-m*an, then exhaled deeply.

Hearing that, I flinched and glanced over at him.

“Sorry, is it uncomfortable?”

“Oh, no. It’s just because of the trauma, there’s nothing I can do about it.”

Yoon Hamin shook his head hurriedly.

If he said it was uncomfortable and to leave, I would have had to go, but I felt relieved that he just said it and then closed his eyes.

“…Thank you.”

I replied with a smile.

It seemed that because the protagonist Yoon Hamin was here, I was saved, even if just a little.

Whether in a world where we couldn’t meet or in a world where we finally could, I felt a subtle feeling of only receiving help.

Curling up on his left side, I deeply rested my head on the pillow I brought.

Then I gently closed my eyes.

It felt comfortable. Comforting and nice.

It was dark, but it wasn’t lonely or cold, so I could be at ease.

I didn’t have to scream out of fear.

I didn’t have to spring up in a cold sweat.

I didn’t have to be afraid of not knowing when I might be dragged back there.

So, I liked this place.

Next to Yoon Hamin.

Suddenly, there were times when I felt the sleeping time was too short.

That was right when I had to wake my tired mind the next day to get ready for the academy.

Not just for students, but for workers as well.

As I rubbed my sleepy eyes open, I found Yoon Hamin next to me, curled up like a shrimp.

“…Yoon Hamin?”

“Oh, you’re awake?”

He hesitated and then hurriedly rushed out of the room in an awkward position.

I hadn’t said anything, but seeing him suddenly run away somewhere left me with a strange feeling.

Ah, my clothes are slightly rumpled.

Noticing my belly was slightly exposed, I quickly adjusted them.

Then, looking out as it brightened outside, I searched for my uniform to put on.

“Speaking of which, the lunchbox…”

I muttered to myself, staring at the empty kitchen.

Not that I cared specifically, but since I had told Orca to pack a lunch, it would seem odd to not bring anything at all, so I felt like I had to prepare something.

Before, here as well, I had been too busy buying food like bread or kimbap because I hadn’t the leisure to cook, so I didn’t know how to cook.

However, if Yoon Hamin was busy with something, I thought it might be better to try to help out carefully.

I didn’t completely mess it up, but I didn’t do well either, leaving only a vague feeling.

The rolled omelet turned into scrambled eggs, and the donggeurangttang was a bit blackened.

I was blankly watching it when I rummaged through the lunchbox.

Then Yoon Hamin, who had entered the bathroom, finally came out.

“Kanna, what are you doing?”

“This… I thought you seemed busy, so I tried to help out…”

I knew that Yoon Hamin was an excellent cook, but I thought I could do these simple things myself, so I gave it a try.

The attempt was good, but the results weren’t, which was the problem.

Yoon Hamin gazed at the strange combination of food on the plate and sighed.

“Scrambled, and what’s this?”

“…Donggeurangttang.”

“Oh, you used that.”

“Sorry.”

“No, it was meant to be used anyway.”

Yoon Hamin said that and laughed softly.

“I told Orca to pack a lunch, and if we don’t pack one too, it might seem a bit bad…”

“That’s true. Oh right. It was, wasn’t it.”

What’s this guy thinking?

“Where are the sausages…”

Yoon Hamin pulled out Vienna sausages from a bag next to him.

Saying he would cut them once I made the rolled omelet, he grabbed the unused kn*fe and swiftly moved it to extract what was inside.

I wondered if this was what it took to be the standout top student in practical training.

The weapon skills curriculum was in the second year, so even if he was good with a sword, it wouldn’t reflect in grades.

After slicing the Vienna sausages and tossing them into the frying pan, I could see them starting to take the shape of octopuses once the heat was applied.

“Oh wow…”

“Looks delicious, right?”

As I marveled, Yoon Hamin naturally smiled at me.

I opened my eyes wide and looked at him.

Then I lowered my head again and fixed my gaze on the frying pan.

“Um, sausages all pretty much taste the same, right?”

“Kanna, are you going to take this?”

“…No, ah, I guess I should.”

It seemed like cooking prioritized skill over effort.

While effort was necessary to obtain skill.

Hmm, looking once more, I put the scrambled eggs and the blackened donggeurangttang into my lunchbox.

“Um, thank you.”

I didn’t forget to be grateful to Yoon Hamin for letting me use the ingredients and saying it was okay to eat as well.

I could forget about it being borrowed or something, but I knew I shouldn’t forget about what should properly be given.

Yoon Hamin stared blankly for a moment, then chuckled and called out to me.

“Kanna, do you want to eat this too?”

Yoon Hamin turned off the stove and offered me the Vienna sausages.

I liked sausages, but honestly, I thought it might be a bit awkward this way, so I shook my head.

“No.”

“Uh, why?”

“I thought Orca might find it odd if our menus are the same.”

When I answered like that, Yoon Hamin sighed, “Ah.”

There was no reason to lower my favorability with Orca here.

For that reason, I quietly drew a line.

Then Yoon Hamin looked like he had a good idea and smiled brightly.

“Then since I cooked a lot, let’s put it all here and share it at lunchtime.”

“Uh, huh?”

So that was an option?

He really was smart as the top student.

Thus, waking up early in the morning to prepare lunchboxes, we moved around busily, strapped on our bags, and headed to the academy.

Yoon Hamin looked a bit tired, but today he seemed to have a clearer face.

I wondered if it was fortunate, feeling like it might be because of me.

But at this moment, something else felt more important than that.

“Oh, Lady Orca.”

While I was getting ready to take out the lunchbox during lunchtime, I noticed that Orca wasn’t holding a lunchbox.

Instead, she was holding a device.

“Ah, I forgot my lunch.”

She smiled kindly as she made a phone call, and not long after, a well-dressed person appeared within the academy carrying an exquisite box.

Could outsiders enter like this?

Could a servant belonging to the Lamiris family easily come into such a place?

Lost in such thoughts and staring blankly, Orca confidently opened the bundle and took out her lunch.

While my lunch looked like a studio apartment, Orca’s lunch appeared to be something akin to an apartment, which felt intriguing.

“Here, Yoon Hamin, come eat with us. Let’s share.”

Orca spread out her lunch after placing it on the desk to be able to sit wide.

Meanwhile, Yoon Hamin stood there blankly, then opened his mouth in shock.

“No, what is this…”

“This is made by the head chef of my mansion, so the taste is guaranteed.”

Should I say she’s the daughter of a well-off family?

Seeing her use such things so naturally made me think she was quite impressive.

There were six lunchboxes laid out on the desk; two were mine and Yoon Hamin’s, but the other four were all Orca’s, which was unbelievable.

However, they didn’t look unappetizing, making my mouth water involuntarily.

I felt the stares of students who arrived a bit late to the cafeteria.

It wasn’t that the meals served were lacking, but the quality of lunchboxes prepared for just one person was inescapable, making everyone feel uneasy.

Orca proudly picked up a fork.

Yoon Hamin, who was standing next to her blankly, glanced at his lunchbox, then looked at me once.

It seemed he was going to offer me the Vienna sausages.

Ch. 51 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 51

Lunchtime passed smoothly.

Everyone was busy filling up on bakery items or cafeteria food, but it was unusual that Yoon Hamin, Orca, and I were sitting in the classroom eating lunch boxes, which drew some attention.

Still, it was important that I wasn’t eating alone since I was with Yoon Hamin and Orca, which helped disperse the gazes somewhat.

Tomorrow was originally supposed to be exam week, but seeing that it had been postponed by a week due to the suddenly changed curriculum left me feeling quite perplexed.

At this rate, it seemed like the time of being in last place would just increase, which didn’t feel good. Moreover, it was difficult to gauge how much I could actually do on the newly changed subjects if I were to take the exam, making it rather ambiguous.

I couldn’t decide whether I should be happy or upset about the postponed exam, so I just read the content of the book.

While field assessments could be somewhat harsh, I felt somewhat at ease about geography, as it seemed like I wouldn’t have any particular hiccup there.

When heroes fight each other, it occurs to me that they shout their positions, and thinking of that as a reference made me chuckle.

Of course, it would be harder than I thought, but in a situation where everyone starts from the same line, if I think that I'm running ahead while they are all struggling equally, it might not feel as hard, and by the time everyone was equally struggling, I'd probably be ahead.

"Kanna, you look happy today?"

"Ah, um, I've just been studying a bit better today."

The time to go home was approaching. I answered Yoon Hamin's question casually while packing my bag, and Orca, who had been slowly preparing to go home, turned her head to look at me.

"Kanna, have you decided where you'll go for this Hero Practice?"

"Ah, I'm planning to go to somewhere that lacks personnel."

It's not part of the first-year curriculum, but starting from the second year, there's a hero practice system. While only high achievers like Yoon Hamin and Orca had the right to experience it first, the current situation allowed me, who was in last place, to have the opportunity as well.

If I were to show that I'm a newbie, it seemed like it would be better to do so from the student level, and once I graduated and become a hero, act like a pro right away.

I knew that I would just be a hindrance in such places.

Running quickly or swinging my fists strongly was something I was better at than an ordinary person because I was an Awakened One.

However, when the talk switched to abilities, I couldn't show a proper appearance and had to bow my head in defeat.

Even with such treatment inside the academy, there was no way I would be welcomed at the agency of heroes, where the real-life situation occurs.

So, I thought of just going to a place that had a quota system or anyplace that was short on personnel and would take anyone.

“…Really? You don’t have a specific place you want to go?”

“No.”

“I see.”

Orca murmured that, nodded her head, and moved her feet.

“Got it, I’ll be heading off now. Everyone, be careful going home.”

“Yep, see you tomorrow.”

Orca’s family car would come to pick her up, so around this time, it was her daily routine to leave promptly. As she moved away, Yoon Hamin glanced at Orca leaving before turning his attention back to me.

He didn’t say things like “Should we go?” or “Let’s go together.”

Since our destination and living area were the same, if our gazes met naturally, we could just put on our bags and step out together.

As Yoon Hamin exited the building, he glanced at me.

“By the way, isn’t there a certain agency you really want to go to? A hero you want to work with?”

“…I’m not sure.”

I tilted my head.

In the novel, in this world, there were a few heroes I knew of and wanted to see at least once. There were heroes who fought flamboyantly and some who fought beautifully.

But what I was really looking at was Yoon Hamin’s footsteps.

Therefore, now that I was already by Yoon Hamin’s side, I had no desire to step into a prestigious agency to see other heroes.

It felt much better to hear that I was taken in simply due to personnel shortages than to stir things up as the last place and tire both myself and others out.

“If my grades improve, I might consider it, but right now, I’m not so sure.”

Honestly, just being good at theory doesn’t make you strong as a hero. In the end, you have to score well in practical exams, and it’s true that doing so would require different training methods.

The problem was that I didn’t know what to do to change that.

As the name suggests, Yoon Hamin was the only one in the story who was pulled into this world. He borrowed the power of the stars and exhibited unbelievable feats with monstrous abilities, making it unclear how to increase one’s own strength.

It was a problem of lacking talent, and because of that, Yoon Hamin couldn’t find the words either and could only grunt in frustration.

A silence settled between us, and before long, the high-speed transportation taxi we boarded arrived at our destination. Today’s goal was to start from a bus stop divided on the map and return to that same bus stop afterward in a suitable area.

Yoon Hamin raised his head moderately to look around and then asked me.

“Speaking of which, do we just have to find the totems like before?”

“I think so. Though it feels a bit vague?”

“It does.”

Yoon Hamin honestly replied.

But at least if we erased that, the monsters wouldn’t break down the barrier any further, so he readily agreed. I was so grateful for that, a smile naturally formed on my face.

We walked along the barrier and looked at the path of the barrier ahead.

Just realizing that the source of my trauma, which invoked my anxiety, was alive beyond it sent shivers down my spine. Nevertheless, it was a relief to know there was someone to protect me.

I needed to quickly find the totem before the next invasion. Thinking so, I moved my feet. As my mind grew a bit urgent, I increased my speed, and Yoon Hamin’s voice called out to stop me from behind.

“Kanna! You’re going too fast!”

“Ah, sorry… I guess I got a bit hurried.”

“You can’t rush too much; there’s a limit to how much you can do in a day. Besides, we need to raise our grades this time, so you shouldn’t exhaust yourself.”

“Got it.”

I nodded my head. I sighed deeply and gathered my thoughts.

I tried to take slow steps again and widen my field of vision. After repeating this several times, at the moment I felt a little ache in my legs, a chill enveloped me, causing me to stagger.

“Gah…!”

It felt like my body was stiffening. It felt like I was reacting to the wave of magical power.

As I slumped down, Yoon Hamin caught me.

Thanks to him, I was able to avoid crashing to the floor, but the previous fear had left me so overwhelmed that I didn't know where to look.

"What's wrong?! What's happening? Are you okay? Kanna!"

"No, ah…"

Even with him shouting in a voice that seemed like it could shatter my ears, I couldn't respond much. His voice came to me as if it were distant.

"Over there, over there…"

I pointed ahead with trembling hands. Intuitively, I indicated the direction, and Yoon Hamin's eyes followed the tip of my finger.

"…Over there?"

Yoon Hamin gently hugged me and lifted me. Somehow, I found myself supported by him.

I leaned my almost tipping head against his chest and turned my gaze toward the source of unsettling magical waves.

After taking some time to walk, I discovered a purple cube.

"This is the totem."

"This? …It looks strangely shaped."

Previously, it had the shape of a feather, but this time it was shaped like a cube. Although the shapes were different, the ominous feeling from the wave of magical power clearly indicated it belonged to the monster.

What I had felt from the monster.

Feeling the flow of magical power more intensely than before, I trembled.

Could it be that I was responding sensitively to the totem, as if the monster could come after me?

There was still so little I could understand. I had to rely solely on what I felt.

Seeing me frightened, Yoon Hamin glanced at me a few times, then quietly spoke.

“…So, how do we break this? I mean, how did you break it before? You hurt your hand, right?”

“Oh, that?”

I glanced down.

My right hand was awkwardly twitching.

I hesitated briefly before raising that hand.

“You just need to infuse as much magical power into it as possible. Things like totems aren’t meant to contain magical power, so you just need to put in what exceeds the limit.”

“You really did know how.”

Yoon Hamin murmured.

“I guess what I believed wasn’t wrong.”

His words followed with a low tone, and I felt a wave of emotions rise within me.

“…I can feel it too. Though it’s not as strong as you feel it, I can tell when I get close.”

Yoon Hamin said that as he lowered his head. His gaze fell on me.

“It’s strange to be rewarded with the trust I had in you.”

As he embraced that indescribable emotion, repeating his amazement several times, I reached out.

“If you just hold it and infuse magical power into it…”

I stretched out my hand to show him that it was okay to hold it. Previously, when it had the shape of a feather, I could easily grab it without any issue, so I believed it was a feasible action.

But telling myself that I was different from before, the totem I held in my hand seemed to seep away and disappear.

“…Huh?”

With a blank look, I stared at the end of my fingers.

The totem that should have been in my hand disappeared without a trace, leaving me confused. Yoon Hamin stared at me, unable to say a word, and I was helpless, gazing at my hand with a blank expression.

The ominous flow of magical power that had been rising just moments ago now announced the calmness of the evening, completely gone.

Ch. 52 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 52

The totem did not need to unleash a lot of power. It was merely a compass created by the monster to break through the wall.

Just as one does not insert a battery into a compass, this totem relied solely on the nearby magical power to operate.

If I were to leave this behind the barrier, I understood that it could break through the barrier between the totem and the monster.

The people here might simply curse at the Lamiris family, spouting words like “mismanagement,” but I could never think that way.

How could I even know to search for a totem in this vast barrier while remaining completely unaware?

Even if it were a family responsible for managing it, finding items that seemed to slip between one’s fingers would be challenging.

In any case, I was able to find such a totem easily. My body reacted.

I wanted to show Yoon Hamin, who was facing the totem for the first time, how to break it as if to reassure him, but I couldn’t hand it over.

The totem vanished from my hand.

I hadn’t even gripped it tightly; I had simply touched it with my fingertips, and suddenly it made a soft sound and seemed to seep away.

My hand, which should have been holding something, was left empty, representing my heart that felt like it might collapse.

“…Ah.”

A sigh escaped me. It felt as if countless emotions had tangled together and manifested in a single word.

Even Yoon Hamin, unsure of how to react, shifted his gaze in confusion.

“Kanna, why did it suddenly disappear? It can’t just go away like that, right?”

“No.”

“Then… did you know it was touched by the monster and broke it?”

Yoon Hamin started babbling about anything that could possibly defuse the tension in the air.

The problem was that I was well aware of reality to the extent that I couldn’t lean on that.

After breaking the barrier, the place where the monster stood would become the stage, but once the barrier was rebuilt, it was impossible to control anything inside freely, even if the totem still existed.

The premise for the monster to command the monsters and cast magic within them was to break both the barrier and the seal at the same time.

In short, it wasn’t that the monster noticed and broke it; it was most likely true that it seeped into my body the moment I touched it.

And knowing that fact made me feel incredibly depressed.

“It feels like it entered my body…”

Now that the flow of magical power that had previously stimulated my trauma had faded, I felt even chillier.

I tried to calm my mind as much as possible and made an effort to think.

I was able to sense the flow of magical power that I had never noticed before. That's how I easily found the totem. However, unlike before, the moment my hand touched the totem, it vanished.

What was the difference? Upon reflection, there was a huge gap between the time before I was drawn to the monster and after being drawn.

It was a clear division.

The monster could easily find me. It was probably drawn in by matching the wavelength of similar magical powers.

Then conversely, could it mean that I could feel the monster and the wavelength of magic it possessed?

And at the same time, because we shared the same wavelength, it seeped in the moment I touched it without thinking.

Otherwise, it wouldn't make sense.

Thump, thump, thump, thump.

I felt my heart racing. There was a delusion that I could hear the sound of my heart near my ears.

My breath became increasingly labored. I was scared. I wanted to check what had entered my body.

Of course, the totem itself wasn't an egg of a monster or a compass dropped by the monster, so nothing particularly dramatic might happen, but the mere fact that the monster's power had entered my body was enough to terrify me.

I stumbled forward.

Not wanting to collapse, I gripped my chest tightly.

There must be other totems out there; the initial totem definitely existed, but I lacked the courage to seek it out.

“Hah, hah, hah…”

“Kanna…! Deep breath! Breathe! Right now… this is too fast!”

What’s too fast? Wait, it’s too far away.

Speak closer to me.

I felt dazed. Was it natural for me to react this way when fear surged uncontrollably?

I frowned. Behind my blurred vision, Yoon Hamin’s expression came into sight.

That expression looked so sad.

*

Having brought Kanna home, I stared blankly at her.

It was truly pitiful to see Kanna’s face drained of color from fear, having lost consciousness.

As the things she faced and spoke of became reality one by one, I believed in her.

And in the end, I faced the so-called “totem” that she initially referred to.

The result of belief can’t always be the truth, but if it is true, the value it brings is indescribably fulfilling.

And that is what Kanna brought to me.

I was glad, but the events that unfolded afterward made it impossible for me to smile.

The totem that seeped into Kanna’s body frightened her.

Her expression seemed as if she was resisting saying she didn’t want this.

Even though it was not a violent movement, seeing her shivering and hyperventilating made it impossible to ignore.

“…Kanna.”

I looked at Kanna, who lay on my bed.

Seeing her eyes closed, seemingly dreaming peacefully, it looked more like a nightmare.

I wanted to wake her, but I hesitated, wondering if it was right to do so in this situation, and only wiped the cold sweat from her and placed a cool towel on her forehead.

It seemed like wiping the cold sweat brought her some relief, so that was a relief.

I feared when the barrier would collapse.

And I trembled at the fact that the monster might come looking for her again.

That fear surfaced long-silent trauma, and Kanna, because of that, was scared to be alone in a dark space.

It was a truly unfortunate situation.

It was said that all humans captured by the monster had died, yet it seemed that Kanna alone was repeatedly subjected to this treatment.

Letting go, capturing again.

Letting go, capturing again.

It seemed that the intention was to ruin someone by repeating that act.

Perhaps, it wasn’t that the monster was angry but rather that it had insight into the weakness of the newly introduced monster and spread this knowledge to save the people it could k*ll.

Because Kanna was so, it seemed that the monster was taking its anger out.

I stayed next to Kanna, who was afraid to be alone in the dark.

Since turning on the light would likely make her uncomfortable, I had no choice but to stay by her side in the dark.

After all, I felt as if we would suggest sleeping together again tonight, so I quietly waited and settled beside her.

“…….”

I believed in Kanna.

And that belief was rewarded.

Would Kanna trust me?

I had my doubts. But those doubts were soon resolved without any warning.

No matter how close we were, even if he were a boy from my class, recalling times when he had approached me unguardedly while sleeping seemed to indicate that he did trust me.

I couldn’t help but chuckle nervously, turning my head

And my gaze returned to Kanna.

There she was, with her eyes half-closed.

“Kanna?”

As I cautiously approached, making a rustling sound, Kanna groaned.

It seemed like her consciousness was a bit hazy, a little dazed.

I watched her for a long moment before carefully repeating her name.

“Kanna?”

“…Uh.”

Kanna murmured, perhaps unconsciously answering upon hearing her name.

But there was no focus in her gaze. Her blank eyes were merely staring at the dark ceiling.

And she murmured.

“…I’m scared. H-h-don’t.”

The moment I heard that, chills ran down my spine.

My body instinctively shrank.

Though her eyes were hazy and I couldn’t discern the emotion in them, something vividly sounded from her voice.

“I don’t want it, I don’t want it…”

Kanna was resisting.

Even though her eyes were slightly open, it seemed her mind was still in dreamland.

She seemed unable to escape the tormenting nightmare.

I wanted to save her, so I deliberately leaned my face close to where she was looking.

I wanted to convey that I was here, that Yoon Hamin was beside her, that she could feel at ease.

“Kanna.”

So I whispered, even calling her name.

Kanna remained still, then murmured with a quivering voice.

“…Save me.”

“I will save you. Okay? I’m here. You can relax now. It’s okay to not be scared.”

I repeatedly urged her to calm down while leaving her to suffer in the void.

I desperately wished for her to regain her senses.

“…Please. Kanna.”

“Ah.”

With a sudden cut-off sound, her eyes seemed to gain a hint of light.

As if vitality had returned, her purple eyes reflected the light seeping in from beyond the window.

And at that moment, meeting my gaze, she opened her mouth.

“…Star.”

Then she quietly closed her eyes.

Instinctively checking her pulse, I felt a sense of relief.

But afterward, I felt my heart racing.

I hadn’t said anything about my abilities, yet she had called me a star as if she knew.

Ch. 53 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 53

I sat beside Kanna, lost in thought for a long time.

Since Kanna was the only one who associated the word “star” with me, I felt even more dazed.

How did she know when I hadn’t told anyone? No, it must be just a coincidence.

But even if I accepted that it was coincidence, hearing the word “star” made my heart race for no reason.

With a hazy gaze, struggling in a nightmare, I met someone at the end, and while I couldn’t say it was specifically because of me, still, the thought of “what if” made me anxious.

The time was 10:30.

I had laid Kanna down on the bed after the sun had completely set, but it was still an ambiguous time for sleep. If I went to bed too early, it would interfere with my daily life, and I felt uncertain.

“Ugh…”

Kanna seemed to groan, sweating and looking uncomfortable. She moved her body, causing me to flinch.

Thinking it might be too warm, I pulled the blanket away.

Yet looking at Kanna wriggling, it seemed like that blazer was constricting her.

Now that I think about it, Kanna would usually take off her blazer as soon as she got home. It made sense since she wouldn’t wear it when she was resting comfortably at home.

So I naturally reached out for it, but as I tried to grab her blazer, I suddenly recalled her voice.

‘…I didn’t expect you to reach this far.’

I felt like I could even see Kanna glaring at me with her fierce eyes.

But that was a completely different story, so I thought about addressing Kanna’s discomfort first. I gently lifted her, taking off the blazer.

I couldn’t touch her shirt or skirt, so I let that go and wiped the cold sweat off her face.

I didn’t know whether it was the absorbed totem that was the problem, or if it was a trauma so frightening that she couldn’t bear it. All I could think about was wanting her to wake up healthy.

At some point, I must have fallen asleep because when I opened my tired eyes, I felt a bright light shining in on my eyelids.

As I groaned and lifted my head to clear my hazy mind, I felt a gentle hand petting my head.

“Are you awake?”

At Kanna’s voice, I opened my eyes wide and looked at her face.

Her eyes looked gloomy as if she were about to cry, but her lip corners were trembling in a way that seemed happy.

It felt like I was just lying next to her, doing a bit more to care for Kanna before I fell asleep. Since I hadn’t rested comfortably on the bed, my body

felt sluggish.

“Uh, are you okay?”

“Me? Thanks to you.”

Kanna replied and tapped her chest. Looking at her with a bittersweet expression made me hesitate to say anything.

“I brought you back because you fainted just like that yesterday. And, um, since you looked uncomfortable, I hung your blazer up.”

I pointed to the clothes rack in the back. Kanna’s blazer was hanging there, separated.

Kanna glanced at my gesture and nodded.

“Thank you. I must have troubled you again. I didn’t sleep well, did I?”

“No, it’s okay for me to sleep like this.”

“Rest a bit more.”

“I need to start preparing lunch soon.”

“Is there even a chance to eat lunch today since it’s practical training?”

Ah, right. I had almost forgotten in the chaos.

I took the device from my pocket, tapped it a few times, and looked inside. Realizing again that I was supposed to choose an agency and go for practical training instead of having an exam, I sighed.

Surely, they would want the top student from various places, but I still had the choice…

As I glanced at Kanna, she pulled the blanket away in the opposite direction of where I was pointing and wriggled herself out.

“Ugh, I look terrible.”

She shook her head a few times and glanced at me. Then, cautiously,

“I-I’m going to wash up in the morning…!”

She shouted that and dashed out of the room. I watched her go and let out a quiet sigh.

Then I buried my face into the spot where Kanna had just laid, closing my eyes to shake off the fatigue that clung to me, hoping she would wake me up if I fell asleep again.

Kanna, freshly washed, smelled fragrant. Even though we used the same shampoo, it felt different somehow.

Following that scent that awoke me, I mindlessly walked until I reached the academy, and soon it was time for the morning assembly.

On Wednesdays, there was usually an exam instead of class, so no specific teacher came. Only our homeroom teacher, Lucia, had a longer assembly time.

“Okay, today we’re going for practical training. The attitude and ability evaluation you receive there will count as one of your exam subjects, so make sure to show that you’re the next generation of heroes.”

She said that while looking at some files she was holding and started writing something on the blackboard.

The white lines drawn on the black background stood out. It was then clear that they were names.

Most agencies were located near the barrier.

That didn’t mean every agency; there were also some completely within the barrier. The heroes there often seemed more like office workers dealing with support or documents than fieldwork.

At any rate, since we were in the first year and this was supposed to judge whether we could fight monsters, it was only natural we'd end up entering agencies near the barrier.

"Okay, any student ranked in the top tier has the right to choose their agency. Because everyone wants to take you in, if there's a place you want to go, you can go there."

As Lucia said that, she cast her gaze directly at me.

I expected this would happen, but suddenly being asked to choose first left me feeling a bit overwhelmed. I considered turning my head slightly but stopped myself; it would probably look too obvious.

As I hesitated and tried to calm my conflicted thoughts, Orca glanced at me from beside and raised her hand.

"Teacher, it seems Yoon Hamin hasn't made a decision yet, so may I decide first?"

"Oh, Orca, yes, yes. That's fine."

"I'd like to choose the Helden agency."

"I see. Hmm, okay, I'll note that down."

After hearing Orca, the teacher tapped away on a large device and then turned back to Orca with a response.

"Yes, Orca, you have been assigned to the Helden agency!"

It was a simpler name that came out during geography classes. The barrier was supposed to draw a circle, but since walls couldn't be built normally, a sort of groove formed.

When viewed from above, the area seemed to have a wall that was sunken in, where it was difficult for monsters to penetrate.

It was a place where, despite being hard to recover from once it broke, the openings wouldn’t allow monsters to flood in easily.

It was a place with both losses and gains.

As far as I know, it was a place related to managing another barrier under Lamiris, but since merit is essential, nobody would object to it.

“What about Yoon Hamin? Aren’t you going to choose first?”

Snapping back to reality, I raised my head, realizing I had spaced out. I hadn’t slept well for a few days, so my mind felt like it was wandering off.

After repeating thoughts accompanied by a headache, I nodded.

“I’ll choose after everyone else has decided.”

“…Then, good agencies may not be left. But that’s all up to your discretion. No matter how good a place is, it can still have poor evaluations, and no matter how harsh it is, it can have good evaluations, so think carefully.”

“Okay.”

I responded calmly and waited for my turn.

Orca shot a glance at me, sighed, and shook her head.

Maybe realizing I was trying to follow Kanna, I felt like she was treating me like a stalker.

It seemed my previous attempt to use my ability to find Kanna while she was eating in the bathroom cast a negative light on me. Now, the way I appeared to be following Kanna again seemed to hurt her feelings with that cold gaze.

I wanted to explain all of this, but I couldn’t find the words.

After the top-tier students finished choosing their agencies, the middle-tier students were negotiating and tacitly making their selections.

Eventually, when it looked like the last numbers were filling in, the lower-tier students were selected by agencies looking to build up their numbers.

It was here that I truly felt the impact of meritocracy.

The top-tier got to choose, the middle-tier negotiated, and the lower-tier had to be chosen.

Naturally, as the scores dropped further back, the atmosphere of the agencies didn’t seem very lively. The mid-tier negotiations seemed more proactive than the lower tiers.

When it was time for Kanna to be chosen last, she sat quietly, half-given up, ready to accept whatever result came her way. That sight made me feel unexpectedly sad, and I unconsciously bit my lip.

“Kanna, how about the Larden agency? They’ve reached out to us.”

And that felt like a somewhat less desirable agency. They weren’t chosen by the top-tier and hadn’t reached a significant agreement with the middle-tier, so the Larden agency seemed desperate to take Kanna.

Without thinking twice, Kanna nodded.

“Yes, I’m fine with anything.”

“I see. Then lastly…”

The teacher manipulated the device a few times and cast her gaze from Kanna back to me.

Receiving that gaze, I lifted my head to respond.

“Teacher, I will also go to Larden.”

Ch. 54 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 54

I could no longer lament the unfolding of the original story. So much had changed, and events I could have predicted were now unlikely to occur.

What I had uttered were not predictions of the future but memories of the past I had witnessed. Thus, once the course was altered, it ran entirely on a different track like a train with switched rails.

How would a changed monster break the barrier, and what monsters would it lead to charge? That was concerning, but before that, I was worried about Yoon Hamin.

“…So why did you choose this place?”

I had used the time during the introduction and first period to choose an agency by district.

The upper tier chose their agencies, and the middle tier reached an agreement with theirs.

As for the lower tier, like me who remained in last place, we had to be chosen by an agency. Even the agency that hadn’t chosen us seemed to select us grudgingly.

When the selectors felt awkward, the chosen were a bit uncomfortable too, but last place had no choice.

But why was Yoon Hamin saying he wanted to come here with me?

Honestly, I had thought Orca would go along to Helden, so this was quite bewildering.

With black hair like a night sky and golden eyes shining like stars, Yoon Hamin answered my question with a sheepish smile.

“Well… If there are fewer people, wouldn’t you get more points?”

“You’ll get high evaluations no matter where you go; just how much more do you need?”

“The more the better.”

Yoon Hamin responded awkwardly to my grumbling voice.

No matter how hard the first place tried, it remained first. They had to run, fearing the appearance of anything that could surpass them.

With a vague fear of having no clear goal ahead, Yoon Hamin expressed thoughts that would make anyone admire and gasp in awe, leaving me to chuckle helplessly.

“Impressive, you too.”

“By the way, what do you think of a place called Larden?”

“I don’t expect much.”

This was my first time hearing about the area called Larden. I remembered places where famous heroes resided but not those where nameless heroes stood guard.

I could only tilt my head in speculation that it must be quite pitiful to be chosen last in such a remote location.

Yoon Hamin hummed thoughtfully and shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, it’s an agency where heroes are stationed anyway, so how bad could it be? If the facilities are lacking, it might just be bearable.”

I agreed with that sentiment. Heroes don’t differentiate their ranks; they merely raise their visibility by expanding their activity areas like celebrities.

A hero is a hero.

As that one sentence can explain, the fact that heroes exist everywhere remained unchanged.

The issue was the influence of the heroes.

Only heroes who could be cheered for could give people peace of mind, prompting them to flock to that city.

People flock to the city, which leads to development, then more heroes come in, repeating this to form a virtuous cycle.

In the opposite case, it would only cause harm. Some areas had turned into farmland due to being too sparsely populated to be maintained.

Yoon Hamin opened the door to the agency building.

“Hello, I am Yoon Hamin from 1st year Class A at the Academy.”

“Hello…! I am Kanna Aurora from 1st year Class A.”

I didn’t know why I was trembling, but my insides felt fluttery. Because of that, my voice gaining strength to introduce myself after Yoon Hamin faltered.

With my head bowed, I held my mouth tightly shut before looking up. I noticed that other students were already present, dressed in white uniforms.

Seeing their red ties, it seemed there were second-year students as well.

Amidst those students, a hero dressed like a worker spoke up.

“Oh, you’re here…!”

A man with a fierce expression approached with admiration. Up close, his hair and beard looked stingingly sharp, and his muscles were so thick that they seemed to barely fit into his clothes, appearing stocky.

It seemed impossible not to notice his enormous size.

Anyway, since his gaze was focused on Yoon Hamin, the reason for his reaction was apparent.

“Now that Kanna and Yoon Hamin are here, shall we start the discussion?”

The hero, who had placed chairs around a large table, sat in the middle with his last seat facing us.

Sitting next to Yoon Hamin, I cautiously looked around, but there wasn’t a single familiar face that matched my impressions.

Returning to the conversation, I listened to the hero talk.

“I am Kaluah Dwayne. Please feel free to call me Kaluah, and this is Eileen Belia.”

“Hello. I am Eileen Belia.”

She, with soft scarlet hair, nodded at Kaluah’s introduction and introduced herself.

Then Kaluah began to explain.

“Due to some reasons, both first and second-year students are participating in the training simultaneously. This place doesn’t have a famous hero residing here, and many students may hesitate because it’s in a less developed city, but I think it’s not a bad space.”

He opened a file in front of him and began scribbling on the paper with a pen.

“A hero is a hero. Of course, there are strong individuals among them and relatively weaker ones too. But ultimately, they are doing the same work. The point is that even small towns eventually need heroes. So!”

With a flick, the pen in his hand twirled beautifully. Then, at the end, when he flicked his finger, it stopped with a light tap.

“This means we must maintain a standard even in such places. Let’s try to differentiate, shall we? The grades given at the Academy? All useless. Though it might be convenient to categorize, the practical skills will matter more here.”

Since everyone else, except for Yoon Hamin, was in the lower tier, I felt impressed by his attempt to judge based on direct observation. Of course, it would be sad to think that he had gained such judgment through many experiences.

Following Kaluah’s words, we exited the building and approached the barrier.

Buildings couldn’t be erected in close proximity to the barrier. The fact alone indicated that the open space we were approaching was where we would be active.

In reality, this space had been set up for Yoon Hamin.

There was no way the academy established to nurture heroes wouldn’t have a connection to him. While he might want to see it directly, it also meant he could gauge it to some extent.

However, there was one being with a power that couldn’t be easily understood, and that was Yoon Hamin himself.

There was no desperate need. He already had skills comparable to a hero, making school exams a breeze.

Even in competition, he could measure up.

“All right, Eileen will create a dummy for you. Each will have a fixed strength, and you just need to defeat them one by one. Now, Class C of the second year, Agnil.”

“Yes!”

The one who replied robustly was a blond boy with golden eyes. His hair was casually swept back, revealing an open forehead, and though he didn’t seem overly confident, he took a deep breath and stood before the dummy as if trying his best.

As Eileen began to create the dummy, she explained.

“Recently, the barrier has collapsed twice. This is one of the most frequently encountered monsters statistically, a dog monster’s dummy.”

“Is weapon use permitted?”

“Yes, since you’re heroes, act as if it’s a real situation.”

The class immediately grasped their swords strapped to their waists upon Eileen’s permission.

Come to think of it, I didn’t have a weapon. Yoon Hamin carried one as a matter of course, yet I did not.

“Ugh!”

As Agnil launched a surprise attack, I felt a momentary distortion in the air. However, it seemed ineffective, as I heard a thud, yet it didn’t deal a considerable blow to the dummy.

Kaluah quickly moved on to the next turn after that display, and it was clear they were the skills of students lingering in the lower tier.

Although they were second-year seniors, comparing them to Yoon Hamin made the gap evident.

After three attempts from the three second-year seniors, only Yoon Hamin and I remained.

“…Um. Let’s start with Yoon Hamin.”

As Kaluah beckoned, Eileen created the dummy again. Standing before the newly made dummy, Yoon Hamin drew his sword from his waist and took his stance.

Despite the sword being positioned next to his head, its tip accurately aimed at the target.

A dog monster’s dummy, I was certain I wouldn’t be able to land a blow on that.

While I thought that, Yoon Hamin continued to focus. A point of light appeared at the tip of his sword, and in that moment, the sword traversed the path toward it.

With a piercing sound, the radiant strike obliterated the dummy that had been before us moments ago.

I caught the dazed expressions of Kaluah and Eileen.

It was a natural reaction for someone like Yoon Hamin, a starlight that appeared in a place I initially thought would be filled only with untalented students.

“Well then, next…”

Kaluah regained his composure and instructed Eileen to create a sturdier dummy, but as Eileen brought out wolf, bear, and elephant dummies, Yoon Hamin smashed every one as if mocking them.

My thoughts while witnessing that were simple.

As expected, it’s Yoon Hamin.

Ch. 55 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 55

Yoon Hamin already possessed strength akin to that of a hero.

Of course, if judged by the differences in experience or the level of skill, he might be considered inexperienced. However, in pure power terms, he demonstrated a level that even some heroes could not surpass, leaving a profound impression on everyone here in the clearing near the Barrier.

Although it was a bit unfortunate that I was the last one after Yoon Hamin, I thought it wouldn't be too painful since I had already experienced it in Daebon. Calming my mind, I reassured myself.

Calmly, I compared myself to others and realized that it was just a matter of circumstance making it seem like I was being compared, but I was similar to everyone else. No, to be honest, their attacks had at least hit, so it was not quite similar.

"Next is Miss Kanna!"

Kaluah, who was excited by seeing Yoon Hamin, called my name cheerfully.

From Kaluah's point of view, it must have been a delightful surprise that a promising candidate would take the initiative to come to such a place.

I cautiously stepped forward at her call. The doll that was modeled after the monster's skin density made its appearance.

Although it was made of clay, it was quite strange that it could represent something as strong as monster skin.

Maybe because I realized just how strong that was, a shiver ran down my shoulders.

I brought my hand closer to the doll made by Eileen.

There were no restrictions like during school exams to sh**t from a set distance. It was a relief that I could touch it and manipulate electricity from an even closer distance.

What the school desired was an evaluation, while what the agency desired was practical ability, so the way of conducting the exam was bound to be different.

I opened my senses to accept magical power as much as possible.

And until my mana ran out, I drew up magical power just enough to not collapse.

A tingling sensation arose from my hand. I pressed my strength to expedite that sensation.

Since the moment was going to reflect on the evaluation and thus become a score, I worked half-heartedly.

And at that moment—

Crackling!

An electric current surged as if to swallow my hand in an instant. A purple spark erupted from my hand before vanishing explosively.

As soon as I regained my senses, I frowned at the pain I felt in my right hand.

“Ugh…”

I bit down on my teeth while holding my right hand with my left to endure the pain.

It seemed that just like before when I tried to unleash electricity while gripping a totem, I had injured myself again this time.

A burning heat left a chilling sensation lingering that was too intense. My body tipped forward, and just when it appeared I would crash onto the ground, I was caught mid-air by Yoon Hamin wrapping his arm around my waist.

“Eh…”

“…Are you okay?”

Yoon Hamin stood me upright and attempted to examine my injured right hand.

I managed to relax my frowning expression and withdrew my hand from view.

Despite my efforts, there were enough witnesses, and Kaluah approached with a puzzled look.

“Hey, Miss Kanna, it seems like there’s a problem with your right hand…”

“No, no I’m fine.”

I waved my hand to dismiss her concern. But she was a hero, and I couldn’t fool her gaze.

Kaluah instructed Eileen next to her, and she promptly came forward to extend her hand toward me.

“Give me your hand.”

“……”

In the face of pressure from both heroes, I ultimately surrendered and extended my trembling hand.

“Open your fist.”

“…Okay.”

I turned my tightly clenched fist halfway so that my palm would be visible.

What lay in my palm was a red hand that looked as if it had been fried by electricity.

Due to the high voltage current, my palm was burned black, appearing as if holes had formed, with pink flesh peeking through, and bl**d seemed poised to surge out from those wounds.

Seeing my injury only intensified the pain, making my hand tremble even more. Eileen, upon witnessing it, looked wide-eyed and immediately pulled me inside.

Eileen fetched a first-aid kit from within the agency and treated my hand before finally wrapping it with bandages.

It was the same bandage that had been quite held on before, and as it was reapplied, I felt utterly lost.

“Miss Kanna.”

“Yes?”

“It seems you have a hard time controlling your abilities?”

Upon hearing her words, my heart sank.

Since evaluations are part of the exam score, I couldn’t help but feel a groan escape my lips, worrying that my strange statement might lead to an undeserved drop in my grades.

“I don’t usually have such issues, but I guess I fought fiercely this time?”

“Oh, so your abilities are not typically like that, meaning you didn’t control

them as much?”

“Yes.”

“I see. Even if that’s the case, be careful from now on.”

Eileen concluded wrapping the bandage.

Abilities aren’t omnipotent. To avoid harming oneself, one must control and harness their own strength while expelling it.

In my case, I had thought that even if I attempted to discharge power fiercely, it would only be a current close to static electricity, so I hadn’t controlled it delicately enough, resulting in great damage.

To a third party, it would seem like a careless handling.

However, I had so much I wanted to say. I felt somewhat wronged.

Abilities didn’t grow suddenly.

In this world, the only one to receive sudden strength was probably Yoon Hamin. Even that was already refined power; just because Yoon Hamin suddenly grasped it didn’t mean it would inflate in scale.

Thus, for me, it was beyond imagination.

The power that had been minuscule could not have developed this rapidly overnight.

So I was bewildered, unable to respond, and still felt indignant.

Whether Eileen knew my feelings or not, she organized the first-aid kit and put it back into the drawer it belonged in. Then, looking at me, she offered me a piece of advice.

“Next time, don’t stop at what you think your limits are. Try to control and use even the strength you might have. There can be variances in range depending on the amount of mana, you know?”

“…Understood.”

That wasn’t it.

Eileen hadn’t experienced the total quantity of my magical power or seen me use magic even once, yet she was saying that. Yoon Hamin, however, knew better. The abrupt growth itself was more suspect.

As I groaned while carrying such a heavy feeling within, Yoon Hamin approached me for a moment, perhaps taking a break.

“Kanna, are you okay?”

“Uh, mmhmm.”

“Your right hand got hurt again. Uh, more importantly…”

Yoon Hamin scanned the surroundings and confirmed there was no one around before continuing.

“…Did your abilities suddenly increase? It wouldn’t make sense for the user’s hand to get burned like that otherwise.”

“I think it might be so.”

I nodded at his words.

There was nothing to hide. I had to speak honestly and find out why it happened with two heads.

The first thought was a hypothesis suggesting a monster had implanted something inside me, which could have led to the reaction of my mana increasing.

“Could it be since I was drawn to the monster?”

I hadn’t taken the exam since then, so I had no way to verify. It might just be right.

However, I couldn’t stop at the possibility of the first hypothesis being true, and soon naturally recalled a second hypothesis.

That was the totem.

My body had indeed changed to some extent.

The monster had become able to find me, and my body had started reacting to the totem. However, I hadn’t felt my magical power tremendously increasing because of it…

Yoon Hamin’s expression briefly crinkled. I cautiously nudged him to ease his frown.

“Maybe it’s because I absorbed the totem yesterday.”

“No way.”

Yoon Hamin attempted to brush off my comment, but the serious expression on his face said otherwise.

As I hesitated in that moment, I clenched my bandaged hand tightly.

The rough texture of the bandage wrapped around my hand felt different from the smooth, soft skin it used to be.

I started feeling anxious.

I couldn’t gauge what would happen to my body now.

While I thought the first hypothesis was rather more favorable, the fact remained that I was becoming even more tinged with the monster’s power, leaving me tormented by my anxiety.

Yoon Hamin sharply turned his head.

With the first-aid treatment done, realizing it was about time to gather, Yoon Hamin acted as if there was little time left.

“…You’ll be fine. Just make sure the Barrier doesn’t fall. I’ll take care of the next totem.”

“Thank you.”

He said comforting words to ease my worries, but how could I keep whining just because I was scared?

I managed a slight smile at his words. However, despite my response, Yoon Hamin’s expression did not brighten.

It seemed that the injury to my hand was affecting him.

Since we were spending time together, I thought it best to recover quickly to alleviate Yoon Hamin’s worries.

So, I clenched my hand tightly and hoped for swift healing.

I wished for him to focus more on his goals than on me.

It was certainly nice to have someone protect, help, and care for me, but since I wasn’t trying to take Orca’s place or block his path, I had a strong desire to just step back.

I couldn’t choose to completely distance myself, being in danger of losing my sanity, so just a reasonable distance was what I aimed for.

Ch. 56 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 56

The Wednesday routine had come to an end.

In my first field training, instead of showing any good appearances, I only displayed lacking ones, leaving me with a slightly regretful feeling.

Since I had scored 0 points in the ability exam anyway, should I just think of this as another exam that feels the same?

Just as I thought I could earn some points in geography class, my score was immediately cut here, making it feel like I was back to square one with a plus-minus situation.

Well, there was still a week left until the exam, so I decided to think about it leisurely and moved on.

Even after work was over, my steps did not stop.

I headed toward the next area through the bus stop.

Yoon Hamin and I stepped out, creating an awkward atmosphere.

Until we arrived at the next area and approached the barrier, no conversation passed between us.

With my hand injured and despairing thoughts flooding my mind as I speculated about the reason, my anxiety only grew, remaining sticky in my heart.

Walking along the barrier, I clenched my fist tightly.

The bandage applying pressure to my right hand gave me a strange sensation.

Even while feeling that touch, I repeatedly nearly spoke something but held back.

My lips, which kept trying to part and close, ultimately sealed shut, swallowing all my words.

No matter what I said here, the situation wouldn’t change.

Turning my eyes away from the worst circumstances and only thinking of hope was merely self-comfort, so I tried to face reality.

This was the result.

After a moment of silence, Yoon Hamin carefully spoke to me.

“Kanna. What are you going to do from now on?”

“…I don’t know.”

“If absorbing the totem made you stronger, the impact might be even greater.”

“…….”

It was not me but Yoon Hamin who first threw himself into reality.

I knew I had to face reality, and even though I already knew the answer, I ultimately didn’t say it out loud.

Keeping silent wouldn’t solve anything.

Putting things off wouldn’t resolve the emotional knot; that would only

apply to some events, and expecting this situation to resolve itself was unrealistic.

Totem, totem.

After hearing Yoon Hamin’s words, I considered turning my head away from reality countless times, but in the end, I couldn’t help but think about the totem.

The totem was a compass for the monsters to breach the barrier.

Opinions on how monsters, which had no influence once inside the barrier, placed totems here would vary widely.

Before the barrier was established, many totems were brought out. And every time they invaded, they left even more behind.

There are spies among the monsters. Someone inside lives disguised as a civilian and makes totems.

The inside and outside are merely divided by whether the magical power is refined or not, and the totem is the crystallization of unrefined magical power.

Various questions emerged, but the third opinion was discarded upon noticing the different appearances.

So the issue lay with the first two, which were matters I didn’t understand well either.

As I focused on the incident, it didn’t explain how such totems emerged.

“…Totem.”

I mumbled as I walked along the barrier.

Having absorbed something whose origin and formation I didn’t understand, I had managed to grow, albeit a little.

They wouldn’t even know of the totem’s existence, but even if they did, upon hearing that it would grant power, wouldn’t they be horrified by such a ridiculous situation?

If I became stronger by increasing my power through the totem, and thereby my impact deepened,

and if my body also played the role of the totem, wouldn’t I become a compass for the monsters, continuing to live as long as I didn’t d*e?

I swallowed hard.

And once again, I felt the monster’s face sear into my mind.

My eyes widened. At that moment, a jarring sensation surged up, causing nausea to rise.

I stopped in place, covered my mouth, and gagged.

At that moment, Yoon Hamin startled, grabbing me.

“K-Kanna?!”

“…Ugh.”

I barely focused my spinning vision and raised my head.

There were no buildings near the barrier, making it feel like a runway.

I wanted to soar away, and then fall.

Many thoughts rushed in.

“Yoon Hamin…”

I shuddered.

I felt that he might be right and reinforced his words.

“If, if you think about it. If I end up taking on the role of the totem, then, please really k*ll me.”

“What are you talking about…! No matter what you say…!”

“Even if it’s a totem? If the barrier collapses because of me, will the responsibility fall on my shoulders? Or will it be yours? It can’t be!”

Just like before, Yoon Hamin said he would protect me no matter what situation I faced.

His voice, which convinced me that the desire to live was the same whether I was a hero or not, still resonated vividly.

But ideals and reality always collide.

In my worst moments, I selfishly presented Yoon Hamin with choices and forced him.

After all, if he didn’t k*ll me, the monsters would repeatedly cross the barrier through me.

As that moment approached, Yoon Hamin’s gaze wavered.

He had previously said he couldn’t k*ll me, but I offered him another choice, and he could only look at me with shaking eyes, unable to speak.

I swallowed hard.

Yoon Hamin flinched, then exhaled a quivering breath and opened his mouth.

“…No, Kanna. Calm down. It’s not confirmed yet, is it?”

“But it’s already highly likely. You think so too, don’t you?”

It seemed like he stepped back as if he wanted to escape.

I took a step forward, chasing after him.

“No, that was just a possibility…”

“What if that possibility becomes reality?”

As I struck that point, Yoon Hamin’s voice was swallowed up.

After that, he let out a groan.

“…Kanna, shall we just go home for now?”

“…….”

Yoon Hamin seemed to want to bury this conversation as if it had never happened.

If he thought that was truly a conversation we could turn our eyes away from, then that in itself was a problem.

It would surely be nice if Yoon Hamin protected me.

But from the moment I took on the role of the totem, my mere existence would serve as a spy for the monsters, and I would be in a situation where I’d have no words even if branded a betrayer of humanity.

So I drove him into an extreme statement.

“I’m not asking you to k*ll me immediately. If you think I can take the place of the totem, then it’s at that time that you should k*ll me. Furthermore, if my existence causes the barrier to continue to crumble and monsters keep breaking through, you’d want to throw someone like me over the barrier as quickly as possible, right?”

I wasn’t asking to be killed right away.

Unlike before, I wasn’t pleading that I didn’t want to experience this anymore; I was terrified of the pain that would come to me if I took on the

role of the totem and if it truly made the impact deeper, enabling the monster to find me sooner.

I didn’t want to suffer anymore.

I didn’t want to be with a monster that inflicted pain while keeping me alive.

After saying that, I felt a rush of emotions and was short of breath.

Realizing how agitated I was, I carefully tried to catch my breath.

Then Yoon Hamin, having heard that cry from nearby, glanced around before directing a shout at me.

“What? If because of you the monsters begin to invade, they’d say to throw someone like you outside the barrier as fast as possible?”

His voice sounded incredulous upon hearing what I said.

Then he continued as if mocking my words.

“If that’s what anyone would think, then everything should just fall apart.”

This time, I opened my eyes wide, taken aback by Yoon Hamin’s words.

I felt as though I had been struck in the back of the head after hearing something unbelievable.

Could Yoon Hamin, fighting for a greater cause, say something like that?

No, it couldn’t be true.

Confused, I rolled my eyes in disarray, but Yoon Hamin looked at me with his unwavering eyes, believing he had spoken the right words.

“What do you mean…”

“I said that if you say it that way, everything should just fall apart.”

Yoon Hamin was angry with me.

He was genuinely upset toward me.

“So don’t say things like that. I said it out of anxiety too. But even if it’s true, that doesn’t mean you should d*e.”

What a fool.

Of course, that upright and resolute character makes him an unparalleled hero, but perhaps he is still young and doesn’t know how to make choices.

Right now, I could say that both would be chosen, but once things escalated, would there even be room for that?

I had thrown out the choice, and he merely postponed it.

If the worst situation were to occur, should I reconsider s*icide?

Living as the totem would likely not be well-received by either side.

If I stayed with the monsters, I would suffer pain again and again, and even if with humans, there would be a guilt of conscience for those who didn’t know, and criticism would rain down on me if they did, so when that time comes, I…

“Please…”

Yoon Hamin grasped me as if he were holding onto someone who might vanish at any moment.

His trembling felt desperately like a plea.

“Please…”

It felt as though he was shouting not to leave.

As if he was asking me not to talk about dying anymore.

Regrettably, it seemed that I was not fit to be a hero.

Selfishly, before saving someone, the pain I might have to endure, the trauma that could be deepened, and the criticisms I would receive for simply being alive were so terrifying that I wanted to run away.

It was clear that I couldn’t even bear the responsibility, let alone take it on, so all I wanted was to escape.

But Yoon Hamin was telling me not to run away, saying it to me.

“Don’t say that to me…”

Ch. 57 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 57

I was in a daze at Yoon Hamin’s voice.

Since it was the first time he expressed such intense emotions toward me, my eyes widened involuntarily.

Of course, as much as I hoped for it, asking him to k*ll someone was a matter of making someone a murderer.

That being said, asking him to do so might sound rude and could be painful words for him.

However, if he truly thought of me, I hoped he would listen to me at least once.

But if even that is selfishness, then what on earth should I hope for?

The feeling of not wanting to hurt,

The feeling of not wanting to tremble in fear anymore,

Were they feelings that I could not sort out?

The falling sun was quickly swallowed by darkness in the sky.

I felt my body shiver in the slightly cooler air.

“I’ll be your monster and your savior. I’ll make sure you don’t have to worry.”

Yoon Hamin said that.

I forced a bitter smile at that sight.

Is it realistically possible?

Previously, he had thrown a totem and, a week later, a monster had immediately broken through the barrier out of anger.

If a week is the shortest time after throwing a totem, it wouldn’t be strange for something to charge in right now.

Moreover, if we take the premise that there is a totem, it could have been even quicker.

If he realized that the totem could break, he probably wouldn’t have only thrown one next time.

Is it realistically possible to fight the monsters charging in and protect myself from the monster?

Is it truly possible to prevent the barrier from breaking at all?

Questions arose, but there was no one to solve them.

All I could do was shake my head, thinking it wouldn’t work.

But still, since he is the protagonist, since Yoon Hamin said that, I could do nothing but smile.

I didn’t want to make him kneel down with words like “You can’t do it. You won’t be able to.”

No matter how much I struggled, I did not want to say it wouldn’t work.

Asking him to k*ll me wasn’t because I wanted him to falter, but because if I had to d*e anyway, I wanted to at least minimize what he would lose.

Of course, the feeling of not wanting to suffer at the hands of a monster is stronger.

“Really?”

Maybe that’s why.

In the end, I couldn’t defeat Yoon Hamin.

There was no enemy that Yoon Hamin couldn’t defeat.

He shouldn’t lose now, nor in the future, so I stepped back.

“I’ll trust you if it’s you.”

The only thing I could give to Yoon Hamin, who said he would try, was my trust.

Since he said he would do so, I just had to hope that he would keep that promise.

If that could give him strength, I was satisfied.

Yoon Hamin smiled brightly at my words.

*

My racing heart grew uncontrollably.

In fact, not knowing where the totem might be hiding meant I had to find it as quickly as possible, but there was a limit to what I could look around in a day, so I eventually had to return home.

Holding onto my racing heart, I entered, and Kanna hung her blazer on the coat rack as usual.

I glanced at her. I was trying hard to manage my expression too, but I couldn’t really tell what Kanna was thinking, so I felt uncertain.

Was she also secretly feeling embarrassed about what she said? Or was it just me feeling embarrassed? Such worries dampened my mood unexpectedly.

No, it was rather fortunate that my mood was dampened.

Kanna would likely say she was going to sleep next to me again tonight, and if my heart continued to race until then, I might not be able to concentrate in class tomorrow due to lack of sleep.

Silently patting my chest, Kanna swiftly loosened her blue tie and threw her blazer over the coat rack.

“Hamin, can I go wash up first?”

“Uh, huh? Oh, sure!”

Ah… I messed up.

Kanna spoke absentmindedly and walked away, but it seemed like she didn’t even realize what she had said.

She used to call me “Yoon Hamin” consistently, but now she was just calling me “Hamin.”

At the sudden change of address, I opened my eyes wide and quietly stared at the firmly closed bathroom door after she went in.

Ah, I groaned.

When Kanna came out after washing, a warm and fragrant scent stimulated my nose.

I shook my head, realizing I was almost intoxicated by that smell.

As if fleeing, I quickly excused myself and washed up after Kanna.

With a refreshed mind, complicated thoughts began to torment me.

I tried to think about why Kanna wanted to d*e.

In fact, she had already mentioned it several times, so there was no way I could be unaware.

But how could I prevent the situation that Kanna was worried about from happening? That was the major issue.

If Kanna really absorbed the totem, and if she played its role, contact with the monster would be unavoidable.

What on earth should I do to prevent that?

I repeated my worries.

Unconsciously, I covered my rising lip corners with my hand.

Kanna, who naturally entered my room and settled in, tidied her hair and lightly perched on the edge of the bed.

In that darkness, I felt as if I was about to be swallowed by her gaze that softly looked at me.

“Shall we sleep soon?”

“Uh, yeah.”

Kanna nodded at my words.

Then she slyly raised her feet, which had been below, onto the bed.

As I gazed softly into Kanna’s eyes, the voice I heard earlier flashed back in my mind.

Even while being scared, being drenched in fear enough to ask me to k*ll her, she ultimately decided to trust me, and that feeling made me immeasurably happy.

But I had to deliver bad news to Kanna.

“Kanna, I probably won’t find the totem before the monster attacks next time. If that happens, it will definitely come here. After all, we are in the same agency, even if it’s temporary, so we can manage somehow.”

I could see Kanna flinch and shiver at the mention of the monster’s advance.

I thought carefully about how I could comfort her.

“So I will definitely protect you. No matter how many times you ask for help, anywhere.”

“……!”

Kanna widened her eyes in surprise at my words.

Then, not long after, she smiled.

That expression that softened just by looking at it made my heart feel lighter as well.

Kanna spoke to me in that moment.

“Thank you so much.”

There was an atmosphere that seemed to say there were many things she wanted to say but wouldn’t.

Of course, I couldn’t know for sure if that was the case, and even if it was, it was just my intuition, so I couldn’t press her for words.

Feeling a complicated emotion I couldn’t express, I urged her gently.

“Then, you must be tired, so let’s sleep now.”

“Okay, got it.”

Kanna nodded.

As I pressed the switch, a click sounded, and the color of the room reversed.

In the darkened room, I slipped under the covers with Kanna.

I don’t know if I got into bed right after washing, but it was warm under the covers.

Thinking that my flushed face was due to the heat right after the shower, I clenched my eyes shut.

As I closed my eyes, I could hear the sound of my racing heart clearly.

The heart beats all day, but for some reason, just the fact that someone was next to me made it race even more violently.

Whether it was because it was Kanna or because she was defenseless…

When I turned my head towards Kanna, I caught sight of her already fallen asleep without me realizing it.

In the dimly lit room with a faint glow, I realized it was because of Kanna, and that she was undefended.

It was both reasons combined.

With the pounding of my heart, I outstretched my hand. The arm that crossed beneath the covers stopped just before reaching Kanna’s gentle breaths.

No matter how scared I was, or due to trauma, I felt like this wasn’t good for my heart.

Clenching my fist tightly, I withdrew my arm.

Holding onto my racing heart, I slowly breathed in.

In the past, when Kanna was next to me, I couldn’t sleep properly, which affected my studies, but this time I made up my mind not to let that happen and tried to sleep.

The sound of birds chirping.

The sunlight felt like it was knocking to wake me up.

When I came to my senses, I could still see Kanna, unguarded, tossing and turning in her sleep.

Seeing her sweat profusely and groaning, it seemed like she was having a nightmare, and I pondered whether I should wake her up or not.

“Ugh, ugh…”

I had said I would protect her wherever she was, but I realized I had no place in her dreams, which was frustrating.

Feeling that I should hurry and wake her up since it was about time to go to the academy and I didn’t want to see her continue to suffer, I reached out my hand.

I gently grasped her shoulder and shook it slowly.

Kanna frowned and groaned.

“Ugh, ah…”

“Kanna, wake up.”

“Uh, yeah… I’m up.”

Kanna quietly replied to my call.

“We should get going to the academy soon.”

“I got it, yeah. I’m getting up…”

Kanna responded with a somewhat weak voice, and not feeling well, she got up with a dark expression.

“Alright, Kanna! We need to eat breakfast and brush our teeth before heading out!”

“Uh, okay, yeah…”

I led Kanna, and we moved about before heading toward the academy.

Ch. 58 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 58

As I blankly stood there, I realized I was at the Academy. I felt clean, perhaps because I had meticulously washed my face and brushed my teeth, which I couldn’t remember exactly when I had done. The school uniform draping over my body fitted snugly, leaving me in awe of when I had put it on.

It was always the same when heading to school; I would feel hazy, as if my consciousness could fade away at any moment. Yet, when I finally came to, I found myself at school, making me tilt my head in confusion.

More than that, whether it was due to trauma, or because I couldn’t shake off the primal fear even after hearing Yoon Hamin’s words about protecting me, I had nightmares that left me feeling exhausted from the morning.

The more time passed, the more I feared that even if I found the totem, it might be somewhere unknown and that a monster might lead the villain to us. My teeth chattered in fear.

Moreover, I didn’t want to witness the barrier near where I was collapsing because I was fulfilling the role of the totem.

Yoon Hamin had said he would protect me, but it felt as if something was going to come from somewhere to bind me. I couldn’t help but feel a sense of dread in my subconscious.

Being captured by the monster and dragged back into a cave, being pointed at for ultimately helping the monster, made me worry if I could withstand it all in a clear-headed state.

Yoon Hamin’s choices were ultimately for a greater cause rather than individual. So, no matter how much he tried to reassure me, it never went beyond that.

In the end, there were limits to what one could realistically accept.

Still, from the selfish standpoint, I wished to be protected from the monster. If the monster were to break the barrier and appear, I hoped Yoon Hamin would heroically defeat it.

Just then, the bell signaling the start of classes at the Academy rang through the speakers.

The Academy, along with the agency positioned throughout the area, was on high alert, prepared for the possibility of the monster emerging again.

The heroes, who had been complacent up until now, also began to tense up, stating that the peace we had known was no more. I couldn’t help but think that perhaps it was time to stop feeling overly safe.

Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

Being with Kanna all day was enjoyable, as I could take in her appearance every single day.

She sometimes seemed troubled, but aside from those moments, her smile was beautiful, and when she winked, my heart would race.

When she unintentionally snuggled up to me while sleeping, I would end up restless, tossing and turning in my sleep, revealing a bit of skin as my shirt rode up, causing my body to react involuntarily.

Logically, it shouldn’t be strange to respond to that, but because of certain memories that unexpectedly came to mind, I couldn’t help it.

In any case, as I stayed by her side, enjoying my days rifling through the barrier aside from the heroes, Wednesday, the sixth exam day, was approaching.

“…….”

After finishing the written and practical exams, looking at the results filled me with a sense of despair. While I managed to hold on and avoid dropping to last place, I couldn’t help but feel a bit saddened that the top seat had once again been handed over to Orca.

As I looked at the report card in my hands, I groaned and covered my mouth with my hand.

The quivering corners of my lips were not something I wanted to show to anyone.

Blaming someone isn’t a good habit, and it’s like throwing away an opportunity for self-improvement, so I didn’t want to blame anyone, but this time, I really wanted to.

This is all Kanna’s fault.

Of course, my grades had dropped. It was all her fault. But I had no intention of saying, “So get out of my house.”

However, the fact that we shared a blanket and she tossed and turned while sleeping, getting so close to me and revealing skin, was undeniably Kanna’s fault without room for argument.

When I squeezed my eyes shut and suddenly recalled Kanna’s sleeping figure, I opened my eyes wide. If I thought about such things here, it would only lead to trouble, and as I took a breath, I heard Orca, who had received the top score, mention my name.

“…Yoon Hamin?”

“Uh, yeah.”

“Did something tough happen again this time?”

“No, I studied hard, but I missed it a bit this time.”

I replied with a bitter smile. The reason I could still manage to secure second place despite missing three questions on the written exam was that I had performed overwhelmingly well in the practical exam.

Thinking about it that way made me feel like there was a silver lining in my misfortune.

After hearing my response, Orca seemed skeptical, tilting her head before she began to shudder with excitement.

Though she couldn’t show it outwardly, it appeared she was genuinely pleased. Previously, she had lamented not being able to compete properly because of her concerns for Kanna, but now it was clear that she was happy to have won fair and square.

That joy didn’t seem to last long, but I didn’t mind encountering her as a rival and clashing with my grades.

Standing blankly in the first place, I wondered if continuing like this would lead to me being number one. In the midst of that vague fear, I could set a benchmark at second place, which made me thankful to Orca as well. She consistently showed me what she was doing.

Still, my consciousness was directed toward Kanna.

Though my injured hand had hindered my performance during the ability assessment test, I figured since I had performed better than before, there might be some expectations for her score, so I stood up slightly.

“Kanna, how did you do?”

Kanna shoved her right hand, which was wrapped in bandages, deeply into her pocket. It seemed she had just put it straight into the blazer pocket.

She showed me slightly with a bitter smile.

“I improved a little, but it’s ambiguous.”

Kanna had managed to secure good scores in the geography exam, but it seemed like she still fell short in terms of ability.

She might be able to give her all again, but whether it was because of the sudden strength she gained or her accumulated magical power being depleted, even though she had improved a bit from before, she couldn’t escape last place.

Moreover, it was extremely detrimental that she scored zero due to injuring her hand during the field practice evaluation.

I wondered if, had the monster and the giant not attacked, and had Kanna’s training in body techniques not been left, could she have avoided being in last place?

Those thoughts crossed my mind.

“It’s okay, it looks like you’ll improve next time, just by looking at it.”

“Really?”

“Honestly, it’s just because of your hand. If it gets better, just adjusting your output will get you points in the ability assessment, and by then, the agency will likely elevate your evaluation a bit too.”

Encouraging her like that made Kanna giggle softly.

“Is that so? Then, if I take off the bandage next time, I’ll ask for your help.”

“Leave it to me.”

The corners of my lips trembled. Just knowing that she relied on me was enough to bolster my spirits.

Of course, that was that…

The door swung open. As soon as Teacher Lucia entered, she called my name.

“Yoon Hamin, come out for a moment.”

It felt like a terrible culture for the results to be released on the same day as the exam. Accepting that the teacher knew the results right away and came to scold me was something hard to stomach.

But there was no choice but to go, so I nodded and called out to Kanna.

“Ah, yeah. Ah, Kanna, wait a moment. Let’s go back together.”

As the exam concluded and everyone began to head back, rather than returning, I followed the teacher into the faculty room.

Upon entry, I could feel the teacher’s tone of voice rise slightly.

“Yoon Hamin. Why do you keep barely scraping by with your grades?”

My homeroom teacher, boasting turquoise hair, sat in her chair, glaring at me with sharp eyes.

“Well, I think it’s because my condition hasn’t been good lately.”

“Yoon Hamin, while I appreciate that you showed consistency in the practical exam, there are agencies that base their decisions on grades, so I hope you keep that in mind. Heroes save some people depending on their condition while not saving others. I hope you can learn to manage that yourself.”

Hearing the teacher’s words felt quite embarrassing.

Of course, she wasn’t wrong.

Since only top students could go to certain places, maintaining the top seat so there would be no disagreements was necessary, and my failure to do so seemed frustrating.

But that didn’t mean I could let Kanna go, so I merely took the teacher’s strict advice in one ear and let it out the other.

Unbeknownst to her, the teacher sighed and continued speaking.

“And as for why you chose Larden, think about your future when making your decisions. Choosing something closer to the area where you live might be more convenient.”

“Yes, understood.”

It seemed like the conversation was finally wrapping up. With that thought, my heart began to relax, thinking I could finally go back.

Just as I tilted my head in acknowledgement, a siren, not the usual bell at the Academy, echoed through the speakers.

It was a warning signaling the destruction of the barrier.

I thought about when the monster might come; it felt like it was about time. Just when that thought crossed my mind, it suddenly appeared out of nowhere, which I found very indicative of a monster.

Disasters that strike without warning are quite bothersome.

But fortunately, due to the recent frequent invasions, the vigilance likely would be pretty tight.

While I couldn’t completely trust that everything would be peaceful, it meant that I, as a student, was afforded some degree of leeway. Of course, the teacher didn’t seem to think so.

The teacher shouted at me.

“Hey, Yoon Hamin! Hurry and gather at the gym! First-year upper-tier students…!”

It resembled a pre-hero experience more than a field practical training that was set every other Wednesday. I couldn’t help but recall my previous experience with a hero named Sel.

But I couldn’t afford to participate in such things now.

“I’m sorry!!”

The moment I heard the siren, my body, which had momentarily stiffened, was now directed toward Kanna, who would be left alone in the class.

Ch. 59 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 59

Surely it won’t come to that so soon. The wall has just begun to crack, and no matter how much of a monster it is, it shouldn’t be able to come this far.

Even knowing that, I was afraid and worried, questioning whether it was right to measure a monster with a typical standard, and I rushed in.

Ignoring even the teacher’s guidance, I dashed to the classroom and slammed the door open.

“…Kanna!”

“Ah…!”

At that moment, I locked eyes with Kanna.

I could see her violet eyes shaking.

She was terrified.

Feeling pain in my heart knowing she was scared because the monster had broken through the wall and we received news of the invader.

Still, the silver lining was that monsters couldn’t run at unreasonable speeds.

It would take some time for the monsters that broke through the wall to walk all the way to the Academy. So, as long as we could intercept the flying monsters well, the Academy was a safe fortress. …But that statement was already shattered when Kanna had disappeared earlier.

Everyone now knew that monsters could suddenly appear in an empty space, whether it was the work of the invader or not.

Moreover, if the invader could find Kanna no matter where she was, it meant that the moment the goal was to chase Kanna, they would follow her to the end and unleash the monsters.

Was it because Kanna had spread knowledge about the monsters when she was first captured?

No, if everything she said was true, it started from the moment the first totem was destroyed.

If what followed was just to confirm whether they could find her properly, then this time they might have come to capture Kanna because they were trying to erase the totem continuously.

What did the invader want?

What on earth was the purpose of intentionally keeping Kanna alive and sending her back inside the barrier?

I wondered if Kanna knew, but right now, I had no time to think about such things.

“Kanna, hurry! If we go to a place with as few people as possible and hide, we’ll find a way!”

As I shouted, Kanna hesitated and grabbed her bag.

“What if you slow down carrying that bag for no reason?”

“Then, I’ll just leave it behind.”

Saying that, Kanna pushed her chair back and rose from her seat.

The students who had remained for a moment and the teachers in the faculty room quickly dashed out.

Seeing the monsters charging in at any moment made me sick.

It was frustrating that they seemed to despise our peaceful existence, invading unexpectedly in unexpected places.

Of course, it was our job as heroes to work for such peace.

“Yoon Hamin! Over here…!”

On the opposite side of the hallway, Teacher Lucia was looking for me.

But following her meant I was worried that Kanna would go to the place the teacher managed and repeat the same mistake as before.

So, I ignored her and took Kanna down the stairs.

Kanna seemed worried, her shaking pupils turned towards me.

“Didn’t the teacher call for you earlier…?”

“Right now, we need to get to a safe place.”

As I was rushing out, the vibration from my pocket seemed to resonate in my chest.

While escorting Kanna, I took out the device from my blazer’s inner pocket.

Upon confirming it was a teacher, I furrowed my brow.

Since she was calling like this, it felt rude to continue ignoring her, so I touched the screen.

The moment I answered, the teacher’s voice pierced my ears.

[Yoon Hamin! I saw you earlier, why did you just run off like that…? I hope you understand that acting alone is also rude to others.]

That voice, which came across a bit sharply, made me cringe.

My steps faltered. The wall had just collapsed.

Though the Academy wasn't facing a major blow right now, I slowed down my steps.

Kanna was following closely behind me, and it seemed she was in a daze as she bumped into my back and let out a small whimper.

A sudden worry nagged at me.

How many people would believe her if they heard her circumstances?

If they had seen the evidence and had been observing her actions, they could believe her.

But not everyone would give such trust.

Some might welcome anything that helps humanity, but surely that would be a cold-hearted person who would dismiss Kanna as soon as she claimed she could fulfill the role of a totem.

And for those who distrust before trust, I might as well not know how much explanation would be needed.

Thus, the only words I could say were, "I have to protect Kanna."

I felt frustration, thinking about the circumstances I couldn't explain and the emotions Kanna couldn't express.

Even so, what could I do by only believing in my power without anyone else believing?

I wasn't an omnipotent being that only made the right choices.

What if I tried to protect Kanna on my own and ended up failing?

Taking responsibility wasn't difficult.

But before that, if Kanna were pulled back again, would I be able to endure it if something more horrific happened to her?

No matter what, she was still a student, and she couldn’t ignore the teacher’s words.

If everything went wrong like this, I was unsure if I could handle that situation before responsibility came into play.

Hearing the teacher’s voice, I shut my eyes tightly and thought differently.

“Teacher, I had to get Kanna to a safe place, so I had to come out for now. I’m sorry. Where is a safe place? Not the gym like before where it’s hard to escape with a gathered group of students.”

[Ah…]

As I mentioned Kanna’s name, the teacher let out a sigh through the device.

I remembered when they had gathered in the gym under the wrong assumption of safety without proper evacuation orders, failing to prepare for the attack while the students rushed out in a hurry.

Due to the lack of a second shelter, the students who came out of the gym had gone astray, leading to the temporary disappearance of Kanna.

The teacher, who surely couldn’t be unaware of that fact, seemed to understand what I was worried about.

At the end, the teacher let out a deep sigh.

[Since Kanna has been missing before, I’ll be sure to take care of her as best as I can. Yoon Hamin, you can stick with the hero Sel, whom you met before.]

“…Understood. Where should I go?”

It’s free to make a choice, but whether I can handle the reality that comes after it is another matter altogether.

Am I still too young?

If Kanna is made to suffer because of my choice, I wondered if I could accept that.

“Who is it? Teacher?”

Kanna asked beside me.

At that question, I nodded.

“What did they say?”

“They said there’s a place to protect you.”

“Me…?”

“Yeah, they said they would gather somewhere else, not like the gym before.”

Upon hearing that, Kanna nodded without showing any signs of disappointment.

That was a relief. I felt it would be burdensome to see Kanna in distress, but that wasn’t the case.

I took her back to where Teacher Lucia was, handed her over to the teacher, and then raised the device.

“Yes, senior. This is Yoon Hamin. Where should I go?”

Essentially a deep blue figure, it was Sel.

She had a cold appearance overall, and it seemed as if the breath from her

mouth might freeze, but there was a hint of warmth, likely because something inside was boiling.

The blue flames wrapped around the sword Sel held, burning like it would consume a soul.

Even though I had rushed over immediately upon her call, she was seemingly moving forward to fight a step further.

“Yoon Hamin is here!”

Despite having had impactful conversations before, heroes don’t meet just one or two people a day, so I introduced myself by name.

Her head turned towards my direction, and I found myself face to face with her, who seemed to exclaim in surprise.

“You came a little earlier? Did you run?”

“Yeah, I was worried you might be waiting.”

“Wow, it makes me happy to hear such nice words from you, junior.”

With her excitement a little higher than before, I couldn’t help but smile bitterly.

“Coming early is good, but your response was a bit late?”

“Oh, that’s because there were circumstances.”

“Circumstances? For heroes, this comes before personal matters. Are you still a baby?”

First-year students at the Academy were naturally treated like babies by the heroes.

No matter how skilled someone was, it might be because that mindset wasn’t properly instilled in them. Upon hearing that, I felt a desire to work

even harder, naturally encouraging myself.

I thought my consciousness would often drift elsewhere, worrying about Kanna, but since I had already asked the teacher for help, I felt I had to trust her, so I shook my head and discarded those thoughts.

If I couldn’t even trust that, I thought there would be nothing I could believe in.

“Then, shall we start the class while exterminating the monsters?”

The barrier crumbled in a V-shape. If we attacked well from below, gravity would make the top collapse too, so that seemed to be a natural formation.

And as the gigantic monsters tried to squeeze through that barrier, the opened V-shaped barrier now resembled a U-shape, almost like a door was opened.

Watching from a distance, Sel drew the flames from her sword and extended them forward.

“Follow me!”

“Yes!”

Ch. 60 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 60

The area near the collapsed barrier was actually difficult for people to approach.

The unrefined magical power invaded the surroundings, distorting the flow and causing discomfort.

Since ordinary people couldn’t withstand that sensation at all, they would pull back, but Awakened Ones were compelled to enter that area, thinking they could endure it to some extent. No, it would be more accurate to say they ‘volunteered.’

In this world, being an Awakened One meant you were generally expected to enter the Academy first. Abilities aside, they were thought to be far superior to ordinary people, so it made sense.

After all, someone a little stronger could protect others.

“Yoon Hamin, do you have a way to catch the flying monster?”

Sel, who was running ahead, looked at the empty sky. I, unknowingly, tilted my head up to look and hesitated for a moment.

Now that the exam was over, the stars would soon begin to rise.

I had not just a method but an abundance of them.

“Yes, I do.”

“Wow, that’s really an incredible ability. We can’t let the flying monster

wreak havoc here. The saying that someone will handle it if it’s a hero can’t be allowed to spread. The moment it appears, it must be my responsibility.”

“Understood.”

At those words, a huge vibration reverberated through the ground I was about to take off from to run.

Every time a monster that looked bigger than a house and resembled an elephant stepped on the ground to approach the barrier, the barrier would crumble, dropping debris down and shaking the ground.

“That doesn’t seem like something just a few people can handle.”

Sel paused a laugh as she evaluated the monster visible from afar.

However, I felt confident thinking it wouldn’t be significantly weaker compared to the bizarre monsters that had invaded the Academy before.

“Then shall we go help? Since I saw it, that’s my responsibility, right?”

“Once we arrive, if there are other monsters nearby, handle those first. If we leave something that big to the one with the blue tie, it would just lead to complaints.”

Sel chuckled and encouraged me, as if to say the rookie didn’t need to push themselves that hard.

Even though we were working like assistants in a real battle, it seemed like this moment was more about observing how heroes operate and mimicking them later.

I thought I could do it.

So I thought we needed to subdue these monsters quickly, gripping the hilt of my sword tightly as I dashed forward.

I recalled the characteristics of the stars.

Being chosen by the stars, having the ability to convert their traits into power was more advantageous than any ability.

With this kind of talent, I was able to stay at the top, second position.

I leaped towards the sky.

The situation wasn’t favorable, but the refreshing feeling of the wind brushing against my hair was always invigorating.

Stars emit light. That’s why I could use light-based abilities.

Stars are connected. Like constellations, they could create lines of strong light.

Stars condense and explode. And draw in with gravity.

The world I was stepping on was also just a star, and that was the basis of my power.

As Sel ran ahead, she glanced at the gigantic monster on the left and pointed to the slightly smaller monsters on the right.

“Those over there are already being fought by other heroes, so it’s better to head this way.”

With a tone that seemed half-resigned, she led me, sounding like a person who might tilt their head in slight approval but also in doubt.

“Most monsters are modeled after animal forms. If they aren’t too bizarre like before, most of those based on animal shapes have a core where their heart should be.”

While running, Sel grasped her sword and ignited it with fire.

“But the size of this monster is too large, plus its density or skin toughness makes it hard to cut through. So, what do we need to do to defeat the monsters?”

“…Maybe rely on abilities?”

“Right. Even though we say we shouldn’t rely too much on abilities, in the end, we’re bound to depend on them. The world is structured that way.”

After saying that, Sel jumped.

For an ordinary person, that jump would seem impossible to even imitate, let alone try to replicate.

I couldn’t help but admire as I pondered if an Awakened One’s physical abilities reach a certain peak that allows such feats of strength.

The enormous elephant-like monster flapped its large ears.

As Sel aimed to follow behind after causing a blast with her foot, the gust created by the monster seemed like it would push us back from the pressure.

“Ugh!”

“Yoon Hamin, there’s an unknown hero over there. We have to coordinate.”

“Understood…!”

Perhaps having someone to compare myself to made the person seem incredibly small.

The power emanating from such individuals was immense, instantly wounding the monster’s body.

The monster became aware that it was injured and feeling pain, and it didn’t choose to ignore us like some bothersome flies.

Bwwwooo!

The long trunk stretched upward like a trumpet announcing war.

At the same time, turning its head and swinging its trunk, buildings nearby crumbled like toys.

“No…”

“I heard everyone nearby evacuated! Focus on the target!”

Sel glanced around and swung her sword as if to sever the monster’s trunk.

The heroes quickly struggled to fend off the surrounding monsters, and I was just the same.

Sel thrust her sword into the monster’s trunk.

The monster attempted to shake it off by lifting its trunk, but Sel could be seen stepping on the trunk to keep it from being thrown off while pulling her sword back out.

“Yoon Hamin! Attack the trunk! You can also attack from a distance, right?”

“I’ll try!”

Gripping my sword, I marked a point.

A bright yellow dot emerged right in front of the sword.

I dodged the whip-like trunk. The trunk next to me smashed the ground.

I instinctively tensed up. A single hit would likely mean instant d*ath if I got hit.

For a brief moment, I twisted my waist and stabbed at the trunk with my sword.

As expected, when Sel attacked, something seemed to embed in the body, and it immediately tried to throw me somewhere.

However, I wasn’t doing this thinking I would just stab and get it over with.

“Ah!”

I pierced deeply, bending my body as if to mark a point.

The long trunk swished through the air.

I avoided it and swung my sword, finally aiming at the part of the elephant’s face.

At the moment I drew a straight line with the light, the trunk aimed elsewhere.

I thought it was coming to attack me again, but I widened my eyes in surprise that it wasn’t.

Sel, who had been temporarily retreating, was actually not checking if I could handle it alone. Instead, she was coordinating with another hero, igniting its legs and stabbing her sword into its body.

Bwwwooo!

The trumpet-like sound of its groans shook the world.

Other monsters appeared startled, but that merely created openings for the other heroes to deal with them quickly.

The opposite could occur, so it wasn’t entirely favorable, though.

Connect. Since I had placed points, connect the constellations between them.

Holding onto that thought and will, I slashed at the air.

Though I was cutting the air, I precisely aimed between the points I had marked.

In the moment I sliced through the trunk, a massive trunk fell above me.

Dark red bl**d splattered, covering my body.

“d*mn.”

The bl**d splattered and covered me was incredibly unpleasant.

Since it was so large, I had to attack from below, but I found myself wishing I had jumped onto it instead.

With a loud bang, an enormous noise erupted.

At the same time, an explosion occurred on the body of the elephant monster I had just cut the trunk off, and it staggered and fell.

It seemed the monster, standing on wobbly legs after receiving the final blow from Sel and the other heroes, had collapsed.

Was it trying to show that I could establish a connection with heroes I had just met?

I thought I might feel awkward if asked to coordinate suddenly with someone, but it ended up being quite a valuable lesson.

Lastly, someone else thrust their spear down with muscular arms full of strength.

The moment it pierced the monster’s heart, the core, the monster’s magical power drained away, reverting to its original elephant form.

“…Yoon Hamin, well done.”

“No… you did great.”

“This is how it’s done. Even in the moment of striking quickly, one has to carefully observe what the others are supposed to do. More importantly, you’ve covered yourself in bl**d.”

“Yes, I suppose so. I need to wash up when we return.”

“That’s fine, but it’s not over yet.”

Nodding at her words, I brushed the bl**d from my hair with my hand and charged toward the next monster.

Her unspoken method of attacking while urging me to try following suit felt harsh.

“Even if it’s an unknown hero, it’s still the same! Once you attack, they will give you an opening for the next attack!”

“Yes, yes!”

“Understand that intent, but also predict what kind of attack they intend to execute next, and make an attack that helps! Instead, if it’s an unusual way, they’ll find a way to communicate, so don’t be too scared or hesitate if that’s right!”

Sel severed the monster’s leg and burned it.

As I mulled over her words, I pondered what I should do with the openings given to me.

I cut the legs. That meant it would be restricting movement.

It was a monster shaped like a dog, so it must want to restrict its ability to run away quickly.

However, I had already dealt enough damage to the legs that it couldn’t run properly.

If that were the case, it seemed best to strike immediately.

I extended my sword and let out a beam of light in a straight line.

And it returned to its original form as the monster’s core shattered.

Seeing that, Sel chuckled.

“Good job. Honestly, there are things you can do alone, but even if there’s less rotation, when two or more are attached, this is how it’s done.”

“Ah, I think I understand.”

I felt once again that being in the field immediately fosters my growth more than just learning theory at the Academy.

Moreover, realizing it was practical to use right away, I didn’t think it was a worthless education.

Just as I was trying to find the next target, I spotted something flying right in the center, in the direction of the Academy.

Sel sighed at seeing it.

“Wow, did we miss it again? Or did it originate from over there…”

Hearing those words, I widened my eyes.

I felt my expression stiffen involuntarily.

Ch. 61 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 61

The teachers at the academy were teachers, not heroes.

Though some had been heroes, most had already retired and their skills had diminished. Among them, there might be someone who could match the active heroes, but generally, the academy still needed protection from the heroes.

Being a huge academy that produced all kinds of heroes, it was not reluctant to provide assistance to them.

Under the guidance of Teacher Lucia, they received protection.

The one providing the protection was not Teacher Lucia, but another hero, Asrad. Since he was a hero with a certain level of recognition in the story, the moment they felt protected, they were relieved.

With dark blue hair and dark black eyes, Asrad wielded a sword of appropriate length and pushed back the monsters that were attacking the academy.

Although they had set up some level of defense due to a previous incident, if a monster charged in with a determination to k*ll, that wouldn’t hold for long.

When the first defense line was breached, the heroes panicked and tried to re-establish it. Eventually, they had to muster all their strength to deal with monsters that had made their way deep into the academy’s inner grounds.

“…Teacher Lucia! Have you ordered the students who left school to return?!”

Several teachers and heroes were handling the approaching monsters. The students remaining in the academy followed fearfully, looking around as they kept up their pace.

Lucia, who had been running ahead, responded to Asrad’s words.

“For now, I’ve sent out a general transmission but I haven’t received all the replies yet!”

“Heroes will escort the students who are coming immediately, but for now… ugh!”

Asrad spoke but was interrupted while running as he blocked a bird monster that was rushing in.

Watching Asrad and the other heroes combined their swords and spears to stop the monsters made me feel a shiver run down my spine. Memories of almost having my limbs severed by a bird monster still lingered, leading to a fear that seeped in even as I fled.

“Let’s wait over there on the grass! Hiding inside the building like before… could be dangerous…!”

Lucia seemed frustrated, recalling the time she had gathered students in the gym and lost control as they panicked.

To be honest, it was unlikely to feel comfortable knowing that the monsters could easily discover their location, but the students who needed protection were not ordinary people who could just remain unprotected.

They seemed to want to allow for an immediate relocation in case something happened while also giving the students a firsthand experience of the heroes’ battles.

Even with practical training, there are limits to how many students could be thrown directly into real combat situations, so this was an unavoidable circumstance.

Providing both protection and education, this was a level of Sparta that seemed unparalleled. With the pressure from the monsters felt even here, I wondered how they could endure, and watching the heroes fight right in front of me sent chills through my body.

Asrad used air waves to push back the monsters.

When the air exploded, the monster was slightly pushed back, but that only bought them about a second, nothing more and nothing less.

However, a skilled warrior demonstrated that even that second could be used wisely, swiftly swinging his sword. In just one second, he swung three times, creating beautiful arcs of the sword.

The monsters continued to appear and emerge.

“Where are all these monsters coming from…! I haven’t received any communication from those at the entrance!”

One frustrated hero ground his teeth and smashed a monster’s head with a massive hammer. Even after taking out one, the situation did not improve.

Asrad then shoved the body of an incoming monster back.

“There was a time when monsters suddenly appeared before too. It can’t be helped!”

They knew it was an act of an intelligent monster. Since this was happening after the barrier was breached, it felt quite natural.

The heroes, including Asrad, dealt with the approaching monsters one by one. And in the end, more monsters appeared again.

“Teacher…! Is, um, is it alright?!”

A second-year student fleeing alongside asked urgently while pointing at something beyond.

It appeared that the heroes were growing tired.

The students, who were also under the protection of the other heroes, gathered here. Some students were ready to engage in real battle, but many didn’t come.

Lucia glanced at that for a moment before she moaned, as if in pain.

“F-for now, we are still receiving support, so please calm down!”

At her words, everyone stirred. However, it wasn’t long before the word “calm down” felt inappropriate, as a wolf-like monster pushed a hero far away.

“Cough!”

The hero, who bounced on the ground like a skipping stone, collapsed feebly. Whether they had fainted or just dropped their head helplessly to the floor was enough to stir panic among others.

Lucia appeared shocked at the sight and trembled her lips.

“…No, more importantly… what should we do, Teacher Dante?!”

“It seems there’s a monster nearby. We need to find and deal with that first __”

Boom, thud.

A monkey-like monster climbed the building, showing its unpleasant teeth. In an instant, the monkey monster jumped onto the roof and tried to pounce on another hero.

The other heroes unleashed their abilities toward the falling monkey, but since it had gained some momentum from gravity, it was nearly impossible to stop it. Thus, one hero was struck down.

And before their eyes, they died.

Though monkeys are said to have lower intelligence than humans, being a monster with high muscle density meant that the difference in strength was overwhelmingly large.

The monkey didn’t seem satisfied with just crushing the human it had pinned down and started pummeling it with its black fists. Seeing the monkey with red eyes stained black and a body taller than 3 meters made my throat tighten.

“Eek.”

Students, of course, felt the panic of seeing a seasoned hero d*e before them, and even the teachers trembled, unsure of where to direct their frightened gazes.

Thud, thud, flesh was squashed, bones shattered, and intestines ruptured. While it seemed incredibly brutal to witness such impact, when struck by such a massive hand, it was like a balloon bursting, turning into a mass of bl**d instantly.

Those who could no longer identify the figure of what was once human collapsed, shivering in fear.

And I was no different.

Just a while ago, wasn’t it supposed to be safe?

Still, they had built a defense line, promising not to be victimized twice. What else was there to believe in?

There had been a time I thought that way.

But when a hero died right in front of me, I felt the strength leave my legs.

“Ah, ah…”

This was certainly not supposed to happen.

Was it my fault for provoking the monsters, causing this incident?

In reality, it was best not to touch the totems, and could it be that clumsily trying to change the future had only hastened the impending doom?

I was afraid. I worried that every choice I made was wrong.

Regardless, if I did nothing out of fear, I would surely be slowly consumed and meet the scheduled future of misery, so I wanted to escape from that truth.

But the more I tried, the more that effort seemed futile, and I felt myself sinking deeper into hell.

Just as the monster had said, the harder I tried, the more I felt like falling into a pit.

No, perhaps it could be said that the monster was making it so.

I was so frustrated that tears began to fall.

I couldn’t gauge how to overcome this situation.

Shouldn’t Yoon Hamin be by my side?

Instead of going out for support, had finding Yoon Hamin among the monsters here been the best option?

Seeing someone d*e right before my eyes made my heart shrink.

I felt as though fear was swallowing me whole.

Seeing lives that had just moments ago been alive extinguish like it was nothing felt disorienting.

Was it all my fault?

Could it be that my impulsive actions in trying to change things backfired horribly?

I was repeatedly lost in thought among the terrified students.

The teachers, witnessing other heroes dying one by one, seemed unsure of what to do.

The heroes grew weary amidst the endless appearance of monsters.

Monkeys, wolf packs, dogs, eagles. Countless monsters roamed inside the academy, hunting or killing humans. As morale dropped, the academy became increasingly isolated, like a confined island.

And within that, a voice that penetrated through made the skin crawl.

“—Hello?”

With black hair and glowing red eyes behind a shadowed face, it commanded the scene.

Ch. 62 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 62

A human who commands monsters, the grotesque being.

They easily adapt to unrefined magical power and can comfortably live with it, even becoming one with the power to command monsters.

Though they are few, humanity does not know their number.

It is only known that grotesque beings exist in human form.

Thus, various speculations run rampant, and the existence itself is treated almost as an urban legend.

And the protagonist reigns before me, the unknown fear etched in everyone’s eyes.

I do not know. I cannot dare predict what they will do nor easily gauge what power they possess.

Like how one cannot easily enter a well whose depth is unknown.

Like how one hesitates to enter a dark cave with an unknown end.

People who fear the unseen were fearful of things they could not understand in kind.

Yet conversely, because the depth is unknown, one might leap in thoughtlessly; because it is unseen, it can also make one more courageous. There were times when knowing something became even more frightening.

That is precisely how I feel now.

If it merely looked frightening, I could inform them that there is nothing to fear, as it is merely this and that.

But knowing that it is not the case, I bowed my head in fear.

The grotesque beings are human. Just, slightly different from ordinary humans.

Because of this small difference, people rejected and pushed them away.

Yet despite being rejected and pushed, they survived.

And the human who survived gritted their teeth.

Thus their anger is justified, and the madness of those who are broken cannot be understood.

“How strange… I definitely said, ‘Hello?’”

In the midst of attention, the grotesque being tilted their head.

Knowing that it was not an appropriate atmosphere, the grotesque being mischievously raised the corners of their lips.

The monster stopped moving at the appearance of its master.

At the same time, the heroes who were fighting also froze in place.

All eyes focused in one place.

The heavy mix of fear and tension pressed down on everyone.

It felt as if taking even a single step required courage.

I, trembling, lifted my head to look at that face.

Black hair, red eyes.

The moment I recognized that being, my heart began to race.

It felt as if my shoulders and groin were throbbing.

It was the kind of fear that could be called pain, as if I would be severed again at any moment and feel the cold touch of the cave on my face.

The grotesque being savored the atmosphere.

Then, as if performing in a play, elegantly spread their hands.

The rags she wore were neither particularly flashy nor elegant.

“Disgusting humans.”

A human denouncing another human.

Although it was a common occurrence, the weight of the words felt heavier since they came from someone who had turned their back on humanity.

The one dreaming of revenge raised the corners of their lips.

The one harboring hatred spread their hands.

The corpse of a fallen hero became an unrecognizable shape, a chunk of flesh, and the grotesque being trampled over it as if it were a stage.

Even though the grotesque being stood trampled over a comrade, no human dared to tackle her.

Because they could not gauge whether all the heroes present would win if they rushed in.

Perhaps the heroes guarding the barrier would need to quickly regroup for it to be possible.

Someone must have called for reinforcements. Otherwise, it was clear that all present would perish.

“Ah, did you really think the information handed over by our betrayer would benefit humanity?”

The moment Lucia spoke the word ‘betrayer,’ her gaze brushed past me for a moment.

And it was the same for the person who received information from me.

The fear that had felt overwhelming moments ago began to dissipate, replaced by a complexity that left my mind blank.

Betrayer. I wondered who it was aimed at, and just then, having met Lucia’s eyes, I realized.

No, I wanted to shout, but revealing it now would only worsen the situation.

Not a single word had been exchanged yet; declaring innocence in a place with so many gathered would only lead unknown people to suspect me alongside.

Whether the grotesque being knew my feelings or not,

With every word she uttered, she pressed on, seemingly purposefully.

“Here you are struggling with animal-like monsters. Look, see what I’m trampling on. Should I add one more?”

The grotesque being reached out, raising her hand toward the frozen hero.

The students next to me, encountering the grotesquely exploded corpse, hurriedly covered their mouths.

In the midst of that, the hero who seemed to be targeted realized their situation and immediately took a step back.

That hero quickly brandished their spear, swinging it rapidly.

With a swish, they tried to stab the monkey-like monster.

In the end, they did stab, but it only pierced the monster’s hand, and the monster, considering it no significant hit, attempted to overpower the hero.

“What a bunch of useless things!”

“Uagh, ahhh!”

The hero, unable to retrieve their weapon, screamed and, trembling, barely managed to flee.

And the hero who had been saved was able to catch their breath and escape, thanks to the others striking at the hand that pursued.

With a bang, the shockwave from the explosion made the grotesque being sway.

“Oh.”

Standing before the astonished grotesque being was Asrad.

“Grotesque, what purpose do you have by stepping forward?”

Though he gripped his sword tightly, exuding an aura that suggested he could strike at any moment, the grotesque being paid no heed.

Even knowing this was the heart of enemy territory, her relaxed demeanor felt unsettling.

That aura suggested that she had yet to reveal her hidden cards.

“What could be my purpose…”

At Asrad’s question, she again turned her head and chuckled.

I felt a chill when her gaze briefly turned toward me.

No, please.

Don’t say that anymore.

I am no betrayer.

I have never been on the side of grotesque beings.

Even wishing for such things would not change anything.

“Should I save the one who betrays me and begins to pass information to humanity?”

“The only one who will betray you is another grotesque. How could a human contact you or ally with you? Your premise is completely wrong. If you think such chaos can be stirred within humanity, I can confidently say your thinking is very shallow.”

Asrad scoffed as he aimed his sword.

No words were needed; it was a statement that he would now engage in combat.

At that, the grotesque being gathered her hands and once again flamboyantly spread them.

In the empty space, small cube-shaped blocks dropped to the ground.

They were totems.

So it was true; the grotesque could create them at will.

The form of the totems seemingly did not matter at all.

Confronted with the truth, I bit my lips.

The grotesque being, standing opposite the trembling Asrad, surveyed the surroundings as if no threat posed them.

Then, they looked towards me and smiled.

Faced with the narrowed eyes, I found myself lowering my head.

After all, I wasn’t alone; being mixed in the crowd might keep me safe. I thought to brush it off, but the grotesque being opened their mouth as if not to let that happen.

“Still, thanks to you, I learned a lot, so shall I overlook the betrayal?”

“What do you mean you learned!”

The heroes who had been far away began to gather.

As they started to swarm together, the grotesque being scanned the surroundings with an expression of annoyance.

Yet even in that moment, one could catch the occasional glances from Lucia, which would sweep past me.

Unable to endure it anymore, I wished for the situation to end quickly.

I wanted to shout that I was truly innocent.

“It can’t be helped. I will have to come again next time.”

Saying that, the grotesque being whistled.

Seeing the crowd rushing towards them, they called out the beetle-like monster I had seen before and hopped onto its back.

Then, they spat out a voice towards me.

“Now that you’ve seen it, you won’t act foolishly, will you?”

While others did not understand the words, I knew.

It was a warning not to mess with the totems.

Realizing that showing me she could produce as many as she liked was meant to warn me, I understood.

“Here’s a gift. Enjoy it.”

Despite being surrounded by heroes, the grotesque being leisurely slipped away.

Humanity felt utterly powerless, easily sliced by a single grotesque being.

In operations, the larger the scale and the greater the impact, the more potent its influence would be.

Thus, seeing how they spread their forces to buy time for themselves was enough to send shivers down my spine.

The heroes who had surrounded the grotesque had to focus on fighting the monsters left behind.

It felt as if they gave up on pursuing the one responsible, fearing the ensuing damage would be too great.

Time passed, and somehow they managed to clear the monsters, restoring a semblance of stability.

In the process, yet another hero fell.

Though it seemed the ordeal would conclude, it was far from over.

Amidst the scattered totems, I faced sharp gazes that bore down on me and was overwhelmed, forcing my gaze to the ground.

Betrayer.

The grotesque’s betrayer.

Humanity’s betrayer.

The eyes looking at the betrayer were razor-sharp, as if digging into my chest.

No.

I am really not.

Ch. 63 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 63

The monster has retreated, and the remaining beasts have been dealt with, but the situation cannot be described as good.

The formula for a hero’s victory is always to save people, eliminate threats, and ultimately survive themselves.

In contrast, the monster doesn’t care about the beasts, whether to abandon them or not, and is simply focused on destroying buildings and creating victims; it is only natural that humans, who have many responsibilities to uphold, find it hard to win.

Especially if it means the d*ath of the hero, who should not fall, no less.

There was no joy to be had. A gloomy atmosphere dampened the air.

Corpses needed to be dealt with, and a funeral had to be held, yet it was such a pathetic sight that it was difficult to even tell where the corpses began and ended, as they lay in a tangled mass.

Although it is something one might expect to face when becoming a hero, it was too overwhelming a horror for anyone to speak.

Everyone stood frozen in place, mourning silently.

The farewell was like praise, as white as a flower.

Though they have not gone well, there is a hope they go to a good place.

In the heart of a hero, there is always a chrysanthemum blooming.

While one may be prepared to send someone off, it is only natural for no one to want to confront that moment of preparation.

Yet, if they must send them off, they will send glory and praise nestled within flowers.

“…”

Asrad and the other heroes hung their heads in silence.

The heroes who had fought alongside them and those who arrived as reinforcements were all worried about what to do with the unremovable corpses in the heavy atmosphere.

As the heavy silence continued, something caught Asrad’s eye.

“Come to think of it…”

Asrad recalled something that emerged when the monster had gathered its hands and then spread them during their last standoff.

The purple block made of cubes was suspicious, and it was difficult to guess its identity, making him tilt his head.

Counting the cubes scattered on the ground, it seemed to exceed twenty.

Though it seemed excessive for the little body to produce, if it was created by magic, then he had nothing to say about it, so he decided to set aside such worries for now.

The problem was how to treat this.

The monster had left it behind without using it, so it was difficult to say that it had been spilled by tossing it around as some sort of trick.

It looked trivial, but as Asrad hesitated to touch it, he found himself unwilling to grasp the incomprehensible items created by the monster.

He fell into thought.

He didn’t know where to begin believing in what the monster had said; however, based on what it had said before, there were many concerning matters that came to mind.

The betrayer. It had begun to pass information to humanity.

If that is the case, there must be someone on the human side who has turned against humanity.

Or is there a being among the monster species?

He rubbed his chin and repeated his contemplation.

That, however, did not lead to an easy answer.

He had just begun contemplating, so expecting an answer to come suddenly would be strange.

“Asrad? What are you looking so seriously at?”

Polton, who had just arrived to lend a hand against the remaining foes, approached and asked.

The hammer in his hand dropped with a heavy thud.

Then he turned his gaze to the cube that Asrad was silently watching.

Confirming it was Polton, Asrad turned his gaze away.

Silence lingered, but eventually, Polton spoke.

“What the monster left behind. I need to dispose of it, but I’m wondering if it’s safe to touch.”

“Can’t we just get rid of it?”

“But wouldn’t that also be a trap? Touching it could be too risky.”

“That… makes sense?”

Polton spoke in a light tone but felt the weight of Asrad’s serious demeanor, causing him to adopt a serious attitude as well.

However, with Polton unaware of the situation, he could not come up with anything.

Even if one brought a genius of deduction, without presenting any evidence, it would be no surprise that the deduction could not even begin.

Especially if that person was an ordinary one.

Asrad, noticing Polton beside him, felt it might be better to think together, two heads are better than one, and decided to speak up.

“There’s a betrayer of the monster here; perhaps what it left was meant for that person. Maybe a final mercy.”

Since there was nothing to hide from the heroes, teacher, and students present, he could speak comfortably.

Hearing those words, Polton tilted his head.

“If there’s a betrayer of the monster, wouldn’t that be a good thing? The monster would be sharing information it knows with us!”

“But that means before that, he was on the monster’s side, right? A betrayer of humanity betraying the monster again, what reason would there be not to betray again?”

“That may be true. Yet, shouldn’t we be thankful they’ve returned? Of course, if all this mess comes from that ‘betrayal’, then there’s an issue.”

Asrad groaned.

“True. Recently, there have been frequent collapses in the barriers. The other heroes have been trying to find the reason behind those anomalies; if it’s due to that betrayal, then we need to hold them accountable for any schemes they are plotting inside humanity.”

“What do you intend to do about this? Are you not going to touch it at all?”

“Hm.”

Asrad, shutting his mouth once more and letting Polton’s remarks drift, repeated what the monster had said.

Polton, feeling frustrated by Asrad’s silence, narrowed his eyes and silently stared at his serious face.

“Um? Asrad?”

“Polton.”

“Yes?”

“If the monster dropped this to send a signal to that betrayer, wouldn’t it contain a message?”

“Huh?”

Polton did not understand, but Asrad moved to where the monster had stood as if he could not afford to miss the spark of inspiration.

However, no matter how much he looked, it didn’t seem like there was any hidden message, leading him to lift his head in frustration.

Heroes who were tidying up and teachers and students beginning to prepare to leave came into sight, but Asrad thought they shouldn’t all be sent away, so he spoke up.

“Polton, tell everyone who was here to stay.”

“Wha? But the corpses…”

“Leave that to those who came to support.”

“Alright, understood.”

Polton, unable to comprehend Asrad, nodded, thinking that he must have his reasons and moved to convey the message.

“I will relay the orders of Hero Asrad. All heroes, teachers, and students present, please remain here! And to the heroes who came to support, we apologize, but we ask for your assistance in handling the fallen heroes.”

Asrad tilted his head.

He recalled where the monster’s gaze had gone and repeatedly pondered what it meant to say such words.

The betrayer of the monster. They may have turned toward humanity, but the culprit that caused this tragedy lies within the Academy.

Is it a teacher or a student, or perhaps someone who has already become a hero?

The sudden and repeated destruction of the barriers is to eliminate the betrayer?

If the monster finds that being troublesome, is it better for humanity to protect that existence, or is it better to k*ll it?

The barriers are easier to break from the inside, but harder from the outside.

Even if they are easy to break, they are barriers and seals that are still difficult for an ordinary person to break.

So, is that ‘betrayer’ someone who can help break the seal from the inside?

Or can that existence alone…

Asrad clutched his throbbing head and shook off the thoughts.

“Heroes, teachers, students, I apologize, but I have something to say here.”

As he clapped his hands to draw attention, everyone’s gazes turned toward him.

It was better to avoid too blatant or aggressive words.

However, since it was something the monster had already spoken of and needed to be confirmed by everyone at least once, he decided to speak up.

“It is said by the monster, and we cannot trust it blindly, but if it is not simply an attempt to instigate discord among humans, we need to verify it at least once. I ask for your cooperation.”

Upon delivering those words, Asrad felt the weight of stares intensifying in the room.

The atmosphere even grew fierce.

Although Asrad had begun to speak, he questioned how he should go about finding that betrayer.

Asking if they knew what these blocks were would likely lead to denials; was it okay to ask honestly?

If he suggested physically handling them, he worried about what would happen if things went wrong, including for himself.

Pushing those thoughts aside, he continued.

“If anyone here has had previous contact with the monster, witnessed such scenes, or suspects someone, please let me know. It will be a step toward bringing peace within this barrier.”

There was one person who was unsettled by Asrad’s voice,

and many gazes were directed at that one person.

Ch. 64 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 64

At Asrad’s voice, Lucia immediately turned to look at me. I had already sensed the gaze that had been directed at me since earlier, but the thought of the teacher soon opening her mouth still terrified me.

I was well aware that there were several parts that could be considered strange. Therefore, I really struggled with what to say.

The fact that I hadn’t come to the Academy for several days was due to the attack on the Academy. I had been missing, and quite some time had passed since I reappeared, so it was questionable whether they would believe any explanation for that absence.

The perception that I had betrayed humanity by siding with the monsters and then betrayed the monsters again must not be used.

Once trust was broken, it was hard to be given another chance. I had to live with the suspicion that they would turn their backs on me again and again.

To get through this, it wouldn’t be enough for Lucia’s report; I had to open my mouth myself.

Even though I knew that, I hesitated. It felt like I was approaching a cliff on my own, making it impossible to gauge if this was the right choice.

I was so scared, it felt like my mind was being bleached. I swallowed a small groan that felt like it would burst out, “Ah.”

I moved forward, hoping this was the best choice.

“…It’s me.”

Hiding would only lead to more suspicion. It might actually be stranger to come out through someone else’s report. With that calculation in mind, my heart raced so much that it felt like it could burst at any moment.

Amid the group of concentrated gazes, I felt like I might get nauseous any second.

The man with navy blue hair and black eyes looked at me with interest, saying “Oh.”

Unlike his lively eyes, my mood was sinking. My right hand, wrapped in a bandage, clenched tightly.

“Okay, can I ask your name first, Student?”

I nodded and answered that.

I dealt with the collapsed barrier and quickly returned to the Academy. Though a monster had caused chaos for a moment, I realized that there were no monsters to be seen on the way back, even from afar, understanding that the situation was nearing its end.

I had learned a lot from the hero, Sel, but that did not alleviate my anxiety.

That was why I had no choice but to return quickly.

However, I had not anticipated that Sel would accompany me on that path, so I glanced at her to gauge her feelings.

“Why are you returning with me, Senior? I thought you were going back to the Agency.”

“Are you trying to hint that I should leave quickly?”

“No! I just really wanted to know.”

“…Well, there are circumstances. At first, I heard an emergency call went

out to the surrounding heroes. We didn’t receive any contact because we were busy with the barrier.”

“Is that so…”

Hearing that made me even more worried.

The Academy had set up defenses, determined not to allow the same kind of attack again after experiencing a sudden assault before. It was concerning that they had again smashed through that Academy and disappeared without a trace; what was their goal?

What if it was related to Kanna? That worry must have shown on my face, as Sel asked me a question.

“Yoon Hamin, do you have someone you like at the Academy? Why does your expression look so dark?”

I swallowed my words along with my saliva.

While waiting for a taxi at the express transport stop, it felt like time was slipping away mercilessly.

Although I was this frantic, why were others so relaxed?

“…It’s not that I like someone, but there is a girl I worry about.”

“You? You worry about a girl? Then she must be good at studying, right?”

“Not really.”

In a flash, Orca’s face flickered through my mind, but in reality, Orca was more of a friend who helped me in my studies, and we hadn’t really interacted much beyond that. Thus, there wasn’t much emotion involved.

I would say I had some gratitude towards her if asked.

On the contrary, my grades weren’t exactly outstanding, and there was no rivalry burning between us, plus she didn’t look out for me. However, there

was someone I wanted to look out for, which was Kanna.

Before being in love, having seen her n*ked and having shared a bed with her, maybe the various encounters we had were causing my heart to race and confuse me, but, in any case, it was true that I worried about her.

As those thoughts filled my mind again, I felt Sel's corner of her lips lift as she quietly observed me.

"I didn't exactly ask if you liked a girl, but I guess you do?"

"……"

Now that I think about it, when she asked if I had someone I liked and I responded, I regretted sharing unnecessary information that I didn't have to.

She smiled as if she had found a delightful story, and I couldn't help but feel a little sting from that.

"I don't particularly have those kinds of feelings. To begin with, she doesn't seem to have any feelings for me either."

Was that why? Unconsciously, I was emphasizing that Kanna and I had no relationship.

I wasn't in love; was I trying to make excuses for that? But saying it made me feel hurt unnecessarily.

Sometimes when a few girls showed interest in me, I could sense a subtle atmosphere or gaze, but most of the time, Orca was nearby, causing the girls to give up and turn their backs.

Kanna approached without caring about that and acted nonchalantly.

It felt a bit frustrating that she treated me like a same-s*x friend.

Even to the point of asking if we could spend time together or sleep together, even sharing bedding sometimes led me to question whether I had any charm as a potential romantic partner.

Emphasizing that we weren’t anything at all, Kanna explained that she had no feelings for me. Those words had dampened my mood.

I shouldn’t have felt this way. That thought seemed normal.

Sel let out a small sound when she heard my pointless rant for a moment. Then, speaking to me not as a senior hero but as someone who had lived longer, she advised me warmly.

“Why do you think she has no feelings? Is she completely indifferent?”

“That’s not it. It’s just that she feels too much like a friend…”

Unintentionally, it turned into a conversation like a counseling session, but I didn’t mind. I was just continuing to speak in the hope of holding onto even a straw.

Hearing my words, Sel snorted softly. That “Hmm” sound felt like she had come to some realization.

“That might be because you’re comfortable, or maybe she trusts you a lot. I don’t know how things are, but there must be a reason why she acts that way.”

Hearing that made me recall things worth considering once more.

Even on the way to Central in the taxi, those thoughts lingered.

Could the reason she was so defenseless, the reason she had called for help from no one but me, and the reason she lay beside me and fell asleep trusting me, all stem from her belief in me? If so, that would make me incredibly happy.

As I tried to think positively, it dawned on me that there was ample room to consider things positively, which brought a smile to my face.

I found it ridiculous that I was becoming so emotional over such things, and a bittersweet feeling lingered as I forced a smile.

Seeing that, Sel chuckled at me.

“What’s up? You seem to be feeling good?”

“Yes, actually, now that I think about it, I feel fine.”

“That’s a relief; I wish you good luck.”

“…Wishing me good luck, huh?”

At her words, which I heard just as the counseling ended, I felt my face heat up for no reason and covered my mouth with my hand.

In the moment of awkward stillness that followed, I turned my head. Outside, the changing scenery welcomed me.

Having arrived at the entrance of the Academy, I moved forward leisurely yet with a slight sense of urgency.

Nonetheless, Sel knew I was worried about someone and did not particularly say anything, which I appreciated.

Though there was nothing at the entrance of the Academy, the deeper I went inside, the more traces of impact became apparent. Cracks had formed in the floor and the buildings, and the grass was so severely trampled that it looked impossible to revitalize.

I swallowed hard and involuntarily turned my head.

Indeed, it seemed that the monsters had the ability to store beasts inside and bring them out whenever they wanted. Otherwise, they could directly create monsters.

“…Where could it be?”

Sel began to look for the path with a device in her hand from behind. I glanced at her and quickly turned my head.

I had thought about using my ability to pinpoint our location, but before I could do it, a sound that pierced my ears reached me.

“Ahh, aaaaahhh!!!”

The shrill scream of a girl made my head snap up.

“What is it?!”

Sel also seemed startled, her body flinching, and she seemed ready to head toward the source of that voice. Of course, I intended to follow her, but upon realizing that the owner of the voice was Kanna’s, I ran even faster toward that place.

Before I could catch my breath, I arrived at the place where Kanna’s voice had been heard.

There were heroes. There were teachers. There were students as well.

And Kanna was…

“Ugh, aaaaaah!”

Crawling on the floor.

She was struggling as she failed to control her own ability, sparks flying from her body. The purple sparks, perhaps because of their similar colors, almost looked like a monster’s ability.

Ch. 65 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 65

In a situation where everyone simply stood by and watched, Kanna was suffering alone and crawling on the floor. Amidst this, why was it that no one reached out a helping hand to Kanna?

I couldn’t understand the situation, so I glanced at the closest hero in front of me.

When I looked up at him with wide eyes, I was confronted with the fact that Asrad remained silent, wearing an expression of not knowing what to do.

What in the world is going on?

The situation had already been resolved; surely, if they had defeated the monster, the injured should be taken to the hospital, right?

“What is… happening…”

I almost flared up in an instant, but after noticing that everyone present had stiff expressions, my mouth went dry, and I couldn’t say a word.

“Ugh, ugh.”

Seeing Kanna clutching her chest in distress made me groan. I cautiously moved closer to her.

I hesitated as the sparks flowing around Kanna made my body recoil, but I had to approach her anyway.

“Kanna… are you okay?”

I said what no one else dared to say and did what no one else would do.

With the situation feeling slightly awkward, acting hastily could mean not only failing to save Kanna but also isolating myself from her. I had to act as naturally as possible until I understood the situation.

Was it because I had knowledge of the future or understood that people must go through tremendous trials and errors to obtain such information?

Or was it that the monster was up to something?

Any of those could be true, but given the rampage of her abilities, it seemed that she had absorbed something.

For example, those totems I had seen before.

Kanna didn’t seem to have the capacity to hear my words as she ground her teeth and buried her head on the floor.

What returned to me was a gesture from the hero that warned me not to approach.

“Student, do you know this Kanna student?”

“… Yes. She’s my classmate.”

“I see. Stay away for now. She has had contact with the monster.”

I opened my eyes wide.

“Contact with the monster?”

“She’s been connected to it for a while now.”

“If you’re talking about her being taken by the monster, Kanna is completely innocent!”

Kanna fought for humanity.

The connection to the monster was nothing more than an unreasonable contract, unilaterally established by the monster.

But the hero didn’t think so.

“Isn’t it overly naive to think she was just taken? She might have naturally taken the opportunity to meet with them. Furthermore, when I asked if she could handle what the monster spread around, she claimed she couldn’t do anything about it.”

That was true; there was a reason behind it.

However, in order to explain that reason, I would only be pushing Kanna further into a corner.

The things the monster spread, Sel, who was nearby, seemed to be confused about, but I knew what it was.

It was likely the totems that were left behind.

That’s what caused Kanna to rampage.

I wanted to calm that. I wanted to make Kanna comfortable somehow.

So I looked at the hero.

“… Then why is she suffering like this? Is it right to just leave someone in pain? Is this what it means to be a hero?”

When I shot those words back at him, he made a face that seemed to say, “Look at this guy?” before letting out a hollow laugh.

“Do you really think it makes sense to let someone else handle what the monster made? Think carefully. If she had acted to eliminate it as it should have been done, nothing would have happened. She absorbed it without permission.”

He said that while pointing at Kanna.

“The act of absorbing the monster’s power at will is a problem in itself. No one knows what kind of power could be hidden inside.”

“Conversely, couldn’t it be that the monster did this without permission?”

I swallowed hard, my mouth dry.

“… What is your name?”

“Yoon Hamin.”

“Right, Yoon Hamin. Without evidence and without confirmation, everything is just speculation. Because of that, we must assume the worst.”

He gripped his sword tightly and looked coldly at Kanna.

“While assuming the worst, we have to bring about the best outcome, which means we have to struggle many times.”

It felt like he would strike down Kanna at any moment, so I immediately moved my hand to my waist.

Maybe that movement caught his eye, as he looked at me with a chilling gaze.

And then Sel, who was watching from behind, scolded me fiercely.

“Yoon Hamin! What are you doing! It’s normal for someone connected to the monster to be investigated or punished first…!”

Sel’s voice, shouting as she grasped my shoulder, seemed to come from far away.

I gritted my teeth, staring ahead.

“If we’re going to investigate, then why prioritize punishment?”

At the moment the hero swung his sword, I was ready to unleash my ability.

Yet, the hero didn’t care and aimed his sword at the suffering Kanna.

“Her very existence is harmful. Given that she’s a first-year at the Academy, it seems she entered the Academy at great expense in order to escape the monster, but because she betrayed the monster, the barrier collapsed multiple times.”

“If she betrayed the monster, can’t she be considered on the side of humanity in the end!”

Despite my shout, the hero’s eyes remained cold.

“The barrier has collapsed three times. Considering the damage caused by that, choosing to be protected is nothing but selfish ambition, isn’t it?”

What’s so ambitious about desperately wanting to live?

If that itself is considered a selfish desire, then what about…

“Because of this, the honor and glory of families managing the barriers, including the Lamiris, have been tarnished overnight, the residents around suffered, and families had to lose their loved ones. Furthermore, heroes had to d*e as well.”

I shuddered.

I realized that if I argued further, I would only incur more backlash.

The hero was speaking from the hero’s perspective.

I was merely fighting back because I wanted to protect someone dear to me.

I knew Kanna’s true circumstances, but even if I poured everything out, I wondered if they would believe me, and I couldn’t disclose everything.

If I drew the backlash of others, I would have no way to protect Kanna, so my head hung low.

Heroes had died.

Residents had died.

The barriers that protected this country and city had tarnished the honor and glory of those who managed them.

Kanna, who tried to hide behind that shield, had become more selfish than anyone else, so I couldn’t make any defense.

If I were to say that after everything I’d said, I wanted to shield her, it could only be that my feelings were selfish, that my greed was unfounded.

“……”

With a frown, I lowered my head.

My hand, which had been approaching the hilt of the sword, lost its strength and flopped down.

But did the hero understand me? He shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, it’s understandable that you’d flare up suddenly upon seeing your friend in such a state. If you understood the circumstances and why it came to this, I would be thankful.”

He sheathed his sword that was aimed at Kanna.

“I will postpone the immediate execution, but we will retrieve this student. She will be released when it is deemed safe or if she is determined not to be related to the monster’s attacks.”

It seemed other heroes agreed with that opinion.

Thus, I could only stare blankly at that scene.

Had I been that hero, I would have found a way to speak to ensure Kanna didn’t end up like this.

Now, I was so powerless that I couldn’t say anything at all.

In fact, I could only think of strange things that would disqualify me as a hero.

Even having heard such words, I couldn’t accept that Kanna was being taken away like that.

But what could I do if I didn’t accept it?

I couldn’t change anything.

Just before her rampage, Kanna was shooting lightning recklessly.

The violet lightning, aimlessly flailing in the air, proved that it was not moving according to her will.

The heroes discussed how to calm Kanna down and take her away, then completely knocked her out.

Kanna, who had lost consciousness and went quiet, was taken away by the heroes.

In the middle of all this, no one tried to stop them.

I was frustrated.

Frustrated at myself for not being able to say anything.

Suddenly, I remembered Kanna saying it was better to d*e than to hurt those around her.

Her voice pleading for me to k*ll her still echoed in my ears, but I felt I couldn’t do it.

No matter how much of a hero they were, no matter the greater good.

I couldn’t bring myself to cut the throat of the person right in front of me, like those cold-eyed heroes.

If the greater good requires sacrificing the less fortunate, then it seemed that was not something I could do.

Especially if that person was someone I cared for.

Kanna would be scared if left alone in a dark place.

She needed me to be by her side to sleep peacefully.

That they could just drag away such a tender girl and decide whether to k*ll her or not.

While I thought there might be many who wished for that outcome, considering the people who had suffered because of this and those who had died,

still, my heart was paradoxically wishing to protect Kanna.

I didn’t want to let her go.

And that made my heart ache even more.

If I couldn’t even protect this one person I wanted to protect, then how could I call myself a hero?

If being a hero meant living like that,

if it meant severing all those precious to me,

then I didn’t want to be that kind of hero.

Ch. 66 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 66

The place where I opened my eyes was a pure white space. The lights seemed unwilling to turn off, and the white space was shining bright.

Just a moment ago, it felt like I was somewhere else, but I couldn’t quite remember where it was. Since I was wearing a school uniform, I guessed it might be the Academy, and that was all I could do.

I stood up absentmindedly.

The bed I had been lying on was inorganic. Everything around me, along with the bed, took on an inorganic shape.

I felt as if I were trapped in a world filled only with black and white.

I looked around, but it seemed hard to find any clues about where this place was. Looking at the black table, it didn’t seem like there was anything hidden in the single drawer.

It was neither home nor did it resemble the health room of the Academy.

Moreover, there was no sense of a hospital, making it hard to derive any answers, and I could only tilt my head in confusion.

“…What is this?”

I grabbed my throbbing head and tried to recall what had happened before I lost consciousness. In the end, I remembered that I had absorbed a totem and gone berserk at the last moment.

A hollow laugh escaped me.

I couldn’t do anything, but no matter how much I explained about the totem, there was no way to convince Asrad. It was just a matter of pouring in magical power and breaking it, yet he seemed suspicious of even that, continuing to press me.

I wanted to say no, really no, but if I wanted to assert my innocence, their attitude of proving it through actions only made me sigh.

Ultimately, my body and mind couldn’t handle the sudden flow of magical power, and my memory had stopped from that point onward.

As I aimlessly tried to recall, I felt a shiver run through my body. It felt as though an electric current could flow through me at any moment, leaving me feeling uneasy.

A power beyond my control could potentially harm even myself as a magic user, so I was even more anxious.

In a situation where it wouldn’t be strange to have suffered full-body burns, it was fortunate that I had no pain anywhere.

Not knowing where I was, I felt a sudden sense of discomfort while I tried to find relief in my safety.

As my awakened mind gradually became alert, when I turned my consciousness to inspect my body, I felt something wrapped around my wrist like a watch, its identity unknown.

It resembled a watch with a neatly made elongated screen, but nothing seemed to turn on.

So, I couldn’t even check the time.

Feeling unnecessarily frustrated, I searched through all the pockets of my skirt and blazer. However, there was no sign of a device.

The only solace was that this place wasn’t a cave. It didn’t seem like a place a monster would prepare.

But even so, I had no intention of staying trapped in a place like this. So, I stood up and moved my feet toward the hidden white door in the white space.

Click.

It didn’t open. It seemed to be a door locked from the outside. In my dazed mind, I instinctively raised my head.

Am I trapped? Kidnapped?

Amidst countless thoughts, a speaker’s voice, unclear in origin, stimulated my ears.

[Ah, microphone test 1, 2, 3. Microphone test…]

I raised my head. I wondered if the speaker was hidden behind the neatly connected lights and glanced at the ceiling.

[I will open the door. Please walk along the designated colored line. The designated color is ‘purple’.]

I frowned at the rigid male voice, wondering what was going on.

Click. I heard a faint vibration and the sound of the door opening. It seemed best to follow the instructions for now, so I opened the door and headed outside.

As I stepped into the hallway following the guide, there was a line drawn on the floor.

If there’s a place I wanted to go, it was convenient because all I had to do was find the color that leads to that destination and follow it. It reduced the complexity of vague instructions on where to go and what to open.

Anyway, I walked. The clicking sound of my heels felt slightly louder.

The place I arrived at was another inorganic space, similar to before. A large area stained pure white.

“……?”

I looked up.

Above, I could see black glass that seemed to look down at me. Although it was invisible from my side, did it have a special glass that could be seen from the other side?

[Ah, can you hear me?]

I flinched. I nodded.

Even if I tried to answer, I doubted it would reach all the way up there, and since I couldn’t see anything, I felt reluctant to speak.

There was only one chair provided here.

A single hard-looking chair that I could sit on.

However, hesitant about sitting down, I stood still at a distance.

[Kanna Aurora, do you know why you are here?]

I squinted for a moment, groaning. Shortly after, I realized it was due to a misunderstanding related to a connection with a monster and nodded.

Yes, I confirmed through my actions.

[Then, what was the reason for absorbing the power of the monster on your own?]

My eyes widened at those words, and I raised my head.

I couldn’t tell where they were standing, but I wanted to protest. I wanted to clarify.

“…No, that’s not it. This is my condition…”

[Is there a condition of absorbing the monster’s power on your own? Is it congenital or acquired? When did you become aware of it?]

Although I hadn’t spoken very loudly, I received an answer back.

Perhaps it was a matter of great importance to humanity, but it seemed they were also trying to press me regarding the connection between the monster and myself.

“It’s acquired…”

Thinking that I might be immediately branded a betrayer of humanity made my heart race and heat surge through my body.

I felt sweat forming in my hands. Though I was clearly nervous, I decided to only speak the truth.

[If it is acquired, does that mean contact with the monster is the cause? If so, when did you make contact?]

“Uh, after being dragged away during the first assault, my condition changed.”

I could answer that one decisively. However, that clear response returned as a difficult question.

[Please tell me the moment you realized your condition had changed.]

I exhaled heavily, groaning as I opened my mouth.

“…I realized it while erasing the totem related to the monster.”

[According to the report from the hero Asrad, it is said that you absorbed all the cubes left behind by the monsters. Is that what you refer to as a totem? Please tell us what a totem is.]

As the repetitive questions wore me down more and more, I felt obliged to answer, so I started to speak.

Here, if I were to tell a lie or give a wrong answer, my life would end, and that was apparent.

It would be better to d*e than to endure torture while being accused of being on the monster's side and a betrayer of humanity.

"Yes, it is called a totem… it is used for monsters to break through barriers."

[…I see.]

The voice that had been asking questions suddenly nodded in understanding and fell silent, which made me uneasy.

As if unconsciously seeking a mental anchor, I approached the chair I had kept at a distance and began to fidget with the backrest.

[Then how did you come to know about the existence of that totem?]

"…Well, um…"

[There was also a report that it was you who identified the weakness of a monster you had never seen before. Is this also just light information obtained after being kidnapped? However, this was before the kidnapping took place.]

At those words, my mouth froze and became immobile.

[Do not tell a lie. Right now, you are not here as a student of the Academy, Kanna. This is a place to determine whether you are a monster that causes great harm to humanity or not.]

My heart sank.

I deeply felt the consequences of freely using information that I alone knew, which I couldn't explain to anyone else.

I wanted to say that my only contact with monsters was through abduction, but then the most pressing question would be: where did I obtain the earlier information?

I had been kidnapped for allegedly erasing the totem or informing them of a monster's weakness, but since I couldn't properly explain the source of that information, it made the kidnapping seem like a planned encounter.

"I—I didn't lie…! Really, I found out by chance!"

I exclaimed, overwhelmed with anxiety.

Beyond the black glass, I couldn't determine if it was one person or several pondering and worrying.

No matter what I said, I felt like I was falling deeper into an abyss, blocked by immovable information.

In facing the sensation of my mind being firmly trampled, I groaned.

[What state is Kanna, who absorbed the things you called totems, in? Have you become a totem? Or has your body just been purified?]

Whether they couldn't believe I hadn't lied or were changing the subject, that voice led me into despair. The following voice felt like it was tightening around my neck.

"…Ah."

This is it; it's over.

"…I—I am the former."

[Understood.]

"B—but…!"

…….

Silence followed. There were no signs of any response, and my mouth instinctively closed.

Exhausted, I clenched my fist. I ended up sitting in the chair, my hands folded in prayer-like fashion.

I wanted to say it wasn’t true, but the more I tried to speak, the more I felt like I was sinking into a swamp.

As I felt cold sweat trickling down my back, a door opened in the opposite direction of where I had come from. And then, the speaker that had maintained silence earlier echoed.

[From now on, we designate Kanna Aurora as a half-monster. Kanna Aurora’s human rights level will be downgraded, and she will fall outside the law’s regulations or protections…]

Creak, creak. I saw two people in protective suits dragging a square metal carrier inside.

If it was a joke, I wished they would stop now.

Ch. 67 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 67

My heart was pounding.

The sound ringing in my ears was momentarily accompanied by the feeling of wondering if I had misheard.

So, I opened my mouth as if to struggle and shouted.

“Um, I, I saw the future just once! So I know…! I, I, I… being half-monster is just unbearable… to be dragged along against my will…”

[It seems you are misunderstanding; being half-monster refers to Kanna’s physical condition. Kanna, do you know that a monster is chasing you?]

“Ah…”

I couldn’t say a word.

[You mentioned that your body serves as a totem; does that mean the previous incident is also related to you?]

I realized they weren’t trying to reject me based on some information.

They weren’t even trying to label me with such grand titles as humanity’s betrayer or anything like that.

The mere fact that my existence itself poses a danger within this barrier must be terrifying for them.

“…I, um.”

I needed to make some excuse. I needed to clarify.

I had to say that I had no connection to it.

But before I could say anything like that, I needed to explain in detail whether my mere existence was harmful to humanity and what I should do to avoid that.

But it wasn’t like I had anything prepared right now.

Absorbing a totem was a first for me, and considering it was all the doing of monsters, I had no idea if humanity’s current technology could remove it. What could I possibly know to respond here?

I clenched my fist tightly.

My right hand, wrapped in bandages and never having attacked an enemy, trembled.

“Though I am like this right now, I’ll, um, try to find a way somehow.”

[Please provide a specific plan.]

“……”

There was no plan.

[In recent times, there have been three breaches of the barrier. The d*ath toll of citizens has reached over six thousand. Two heroes have fallen from the Academy, and three near the barrier. If we don’t have a plan moving forward, this will repeat.]

I wasn’t unaware that people would d*e in battle.

But recalling the number of people who died before we could escape was truly heart-wrenching.

In short, it seemed that it was more beneficial for humanity to exclude me than to have me live.

The painful thing was that I inferred this not because I was somehow like a monster or because monsters said it, but because I acknowledged this fact myself.

It felt like my mouth was the source of all evils.

Yet, if I had denied it and claimed I wasn’t, I might have been doubted even more, which was unavoidable.

Still, I didn’t want to be subjected to this kind of treatment.

I hesitated and turned my head.

The people in white protective suits were holding something in their hands.

What they took out from a sealed box, as if it were confidential, was nothing other than a machine.

Its metal skeleton in a cubic shape, surrounded by glass, hinted that there was something inside.

Although it wasn’t visible to the eye, something certainly existed.

And in another researcher’s hand was what looked like a g*n.

It didn’t seem like a type that fired bullets, but it appeared to measure something like body temperature.

I felt a bit relieved that it didn’t seem like they were preparing to do something violent.

“…Um, what is this?”

[We will prioritize the experiment on unrefined magical power. This is to check the physical condition of the test subject, Kanna Aurora. If the body

changes, you will be freed from being half-monster, and your rights will be restored.]

A chill ran down my spine.

It didn’t make sense that they would arbitrarily grant and then strip away human rights, but considering the birth background of monsters and how they exist outside the barrier, it wasn’t that strange.

The loss of human life, and the peace brought inside the barrier, would be dangerous if it disappeared, so it made sense that they were driving me into a corner.

The person in the protective suit looked at me over their goggles.

They aimed what appeared to be a g*n-shaped tester at me as I stood up from my chair.

Just as I was startled, there came a clicking sound followed by a beeping noise.

The researcher who conducted the test checked the values and spoke.

“It far exceeds the standard. What flows through your body is unrefined magical power.”

Unrefined magical power flows through my body. This indicated that I could survive even within unrefined magical power.

I had the same constitution as a monster and, rather, my body had become limited in its magical power supply inside the barrier.

However, the upside was that I could directly absorb unrefined magical power left by someone else.

My body, which couldn’t easily become stronger, had changed to become more easily strong.

Of course, that was why I was here.

The researcher, who placed the cube, made a connection to a hole and valve in a corner and began to turn it vigorously.

The sound of a click seemed to indicate that it was ready as the machine on the opposite side of the valve turned toward me.

I thought it might be an air hose and quietly watched, but the researcher urged me.

“Please let us know when you reach your limit.”

“Okay?”

“Step one.”

A subtle breeze blew through.

I felt something tingling in my body.

“Step two.”

“Step three.”

I felt the sensation of magical power accumulating.

Knowing that the cube contained unrefined magical power, I remained still feeling that my condition was improving.

However, as it continued to stack and stack, my body began to sound an alarm.

“Step nine.”

“…W-wait a moment.”

“Is it your limit?”

“Yes, yes…”

Even if it’s something good, pouring more water into a vessel than it can hold will cause it to overflow, and my body was trembling.

As I tried to sit down with my shaking body, the researcher stopped and slightly raised their head.

“It’s far less than the amount of magical power a monster can possess. Therefore, we cannot conclude that you’re a monster.”

[Then we shall define you as a maximum half-monster. Please continue with the next.]

“Yes.”

After that voice, I thought the two researchers were the end, but soon other researchers began to bring something in.

Thud, thud, and in the formerly empty surroundings other things whose purpose was hard to imagine appeared.

As I blankly stared at the scene, I swallowed hard.

The first researcher who had brought the cube quietly looked at me and asked.

“From now on, I will ask about the moment you were dragged away by the monster. If there are any falsehoods, there may be disadvantages, and if you do not know something, please make sure to say ‘I don’t know.’ Same goes for any ambiguous parts.”

“Yes.”

I swallowed my nervousness.

At least, I felt a little relieved knowing they weren’t going to torture me without reason.

“Please tell us about the circumstances when you were taken by the monster.”

They probably already knew everything since they collected information around, but they seemed to think that hearing it from the person in question would be different.

I was genuinely surprised to hear about human rights deprivation, but, well, as long as I could somehow clear the stigma of being half-monster, that would be enough.

“I noticed facts about the monster and started alerting others to its weaknesses. Then, a hidden monster nearby seemed to have seen that and took me away.”

“So, you don’t have any memories after that?”

“No.”

“Then where did you wake up?”

“It was in a cave.”

“If it was a cave, was that outside the barrier?”

“Probably…”

After several exchanges, I nodded.

The researcher, who was gazing around thoughtfully, asked again.

“Then how long were you there, and what happened to you?”

“…I don’t know the date. But I think I was there for over four days. The incident happened the day before the exam, and I returned on Sunday.”

It was agonizing for me to have to dig through memories I thought of as traumatic, but some moments of suffering must be endured, and this was precisely that moment.

“And I was tortured while they questioned me about how I knew about the monster.”

“Can you describe the torture in detail?”

“…They crushed my hands, and cut off my limbs. They starved me and pulled me somewhere.”

“So does that mean you didn’t eat anything during that time?”

“No.”

Hearing that, the researcher tilted their head slightly.

Then, they gestured to another researcher and soon received a file, starting to write something down.

“Your arms and legs are intact. So, did the monster attach them again?”

“…Yes. After repeatedly cutting and reattaching, they finally put them back on and sent me back.”

“Well, then it would be safe to say that your limbs were implanted by a monster.”

“……”

I looked at the researcher with wide eyes.

“If this is the reason why you serve the role of a totem or exhibit monster-like characteristics, I believe it would be best to remove them. If another breach occurs due to this, resulting in more deaths, it wouldn’t be good for you, Kanna, who dreams of becoming a hero at the Academy.”

“What?”

A dazed voice escaped my lips.

Right then, the researcher was suggesting that since my limbs were the issue, wouldn’t it be better to cut them off?

“I’d hate to see the limbs of a promising Academy student being severed, but with today’s technology, there are prosthetic arms and legs, so perhaps that would be a satisfactory solution.”

“W-wait a minute. If you cut off my limbs and that trait still doesn’t disappear, what will happen…?”

“Then we may need to place you in isolation, or in the worst-case scenario, it could lead to execution.”

“…Ah.”

I lowered my head.

It would probably be better to be executed. Yet, if I could somehow live by just removing my limbs, that might be better too.

If I could distance myself from the monster, that would be a good thing.

“……”

No, I don’t know.

The feeling of having to lose what I had was so painful that it felt like tears were about to spill out.

Clenching my fists tightly, I silently accepted the waiting researcher’s gaze and fell into silence.

Ch. 68 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 68

I had three choices given to me, but in reality, there was hardly anything to choose from. It seemed strange that anyone would want to choose something like this in the first place.

Should I sever the limbs I received from the monster and replace them with prosthetic arms? Should I be exiled to the outskirts of the barrier as I am, leaving my limbs intact? Or should I stay here and d*e as a sacrifice?

Thinking it's better to d*e than to be exiled, my choices were reduced to two.

If I cut off my limbs but the unrefined magical power flowed through my body like the monster's, that would indeed be a despairing situation. At that time, I might conclude that it would be better to d*e.

But how can I know if I don't try?

It's not like I'm being asked to live without limbs for the rest of my life; if they offered me prosthetic arms and legs made of advanced technology, then it seemed that living might not be such a bad thing, especially if it meant I wouldn't be chased by the monster.

"…"

I swallowed hard. The researcher was waiting for my answer.

I wanted to d*e. That yearning stemmed from the despair of knowing I couldn't escape from the monster and would continue to be tormented.

But if I could flee from that despair, I would choose life. What could be more important than living?

“…Pa, pa…”

Even so, I felt a bit of fear at the thought of cutting off my limbs while they were still intact.

As I trembled my lips and swallowed my breath, the researcher took something out in front of me. The document that came close to my nose had a drawing on it.

It seemed they had intended to create this situation from the beginning; next to the image depicting my body shape, there was an illustration of how the prosthetic limbs would fit.

It stated that the thickness and length of the arms would be assembled this way, and the materials would be like this. The researcher explained by showing me the document.

“The prosthetic arms and legs will be made of a metal material that allows magical power to flow well. It will assist you in emitting magical power to some extent.”

“…Yes.”

I nodded my head.

Though I was reluctant, it was a decision that had to be made eventually.

“If the limbs are severed and the properties of the monster still remain, or if the properties of the totem that breaks the barrier continue to exist, and if it causes the barrier to collapse again, then we will reconsider the treatment at that time.”

A sigh escaped me.

I couldn’t be certain, but it seemed they concluded that all three barrier breaches were related to me somehow.

If it was captured on the surveillance camera, or rather, if it was in Lamiris's reports, then indeed. I couldn't deny that I was related to the first, the second, and the third, and that realization hit me painfully.

Unable to turn away from the undeniable truth, I nodded my head.

"Then, let's proceed as guided."

"…Yes."

They didn't ask for my consent again.

Was it to make exile and execution more comfortable by lowering my human rights, or was it to avoid needing separate consent for such surgeries?

After hearing my answer, the researcher continued explaining.

"If the monster attacks again due to this incident, and if it is deemed related to you, then the treatment would differ depending on the extent. If the situation remains unchanged and only the barrier collapses, execution would be carried out lightly, but if there's a suspicion that you've allied with the monster, it would likely become severe."

I thought it cruel to be contemplating whether to k*ll gently or k*ll painfully.

"Now, we will begin anesthesia. To the bed."

As the researcher said that, other researchers came rushing in to prepare something in front of me.

Starting with the bed, they attached various devices nearby and connected wires. Before long, it looked unmistakably like an operating table.

Monitors, lights, and instruments visible among a tangle of wires emerged from their plastic casings. And, as expected, there were saws too.

“…Huh.”

“Now, please lie down.”

It wasn’t an ordinary operating table. It felt like restraining devices were binding my insides.

“Once you lie down, look up at the light and count to ten in your mind. The surgery will continue after the anesthesia.”

“Yes…”

One, two…

And just like that, my consciousness faded.

Thunk, and.

*

My legs trembled. There were more worries than I could count.

The incident happened on Wednesday, and already it was Friday with no news, and Kanna hadn’t returned.

Where could she have gone? Even if I asked those around me, there was no answer. Was it really acceptable for those claiming to act for humanity to treat people like this?

I was well aware that once connected to the monster, there would be no mercy shown.

If Kanna’s existence helped to break the barrier, causing people to d*e, I thought I could accept that, but it was a heavy and aching burden on my heart that I couldn’t easily accept.

Already, it felt like the week was coming to an end.

Next week, I had to go for practical training again, and thinking about going to Larden alone without Kanna made me feel lonely. This wasn't why I chose that place.

But I couldn't just change things without a plan, so I swallowed my bitterness.

"Yoon Hamin… There's probably nothing to worry about. No matter what, it's true."

"……"

A lot of conversations had happened in front of many people.

Because of that, those who didn't know about Kanna were few and far between.

Heroes likely exchanged information among themselves. Teachers probably discussed it among themselves out of concern, but kept silent in front of the students.

That didn't mean the students were oblivious; those who were being protected there were also students, so the rumors eventually spread widely.

It was said that Kanna was the reason the monster could attack this place.

At first, it flowed in an ambiguous way of "it could be" or "it seems that way," but eventually, speculation began that she might have allied with the monster.

That made me so angry.

But I couldn't be angry.

They must have been afraid too. If their homes collapsed and their families died, where could they vent their grief?

"Yeah, it could be."

Even so, to move forward while sacrificing someone they were trying to protect… I didn’t want to be that kind of hero.

After all, I was still just a student and not even a hero. I wasn’t even the top student anymore, and even if I were, I didn’t have the power or influence to convince other heroes.

I felt powerless and incapable.

That painful realization made my lips tremble.

Orca, next to me, glanced back at the empty space behind her.

The budding heroes wouldn’t directly torment anyone. They wouldn’t curse at me.

But if they turned their backs and resumed being just people, then curses would surely flow freely.

I knew it was impossible to catch stories that twisted like that, but once you knew of someone’s existence, it was human nature to care about them, making my heart uneasy.

“…She’ll be back soon.”

Orca, looking at Kanna’s empty seat, said that and packed her bag. Then she quietly, softly encouraged me.

“So don’t worry.”

“Thank you. See you next week.”

“Sure. By the way, it really was nice to train and practice with everyone.”

Orca seemed to recall her training at her mansion dojo on Saturday, leaving with a bittersweet smile. I sat quietly in the now silent classroom, letting out a sigh.

Returning home was the same.

Kanna’s presence lingered everywhere.

Starting with Kanna’s bag I brought yesterday, I took in the traces of her one by one.

The laundry basket filled with dirty clothes not yet washed, which belonged to Kanna. The suitcase left alone in the room I had emptied out. That too was Kanna’s.

There was only one bed, and since it was in my room, I couldn’t give up my blanket, which had never been used properly, folded neatly.

As I stared blankly, I couldn’t help but smile sadly.

I recalled Kanna, who had come back to my room scared and cautiously trying to sleep.

The first few days had been awkward and embarrassing, my heart pounding so much I thought I wouldn’t be able to sleep, but I found it funny that Kanna was completely fine.

Wondering if I was the only one feeling this way, I pushed my bitter feelings aside once more.

Sighing, I closed the door.

The room, the house without Kanna somehow felt empty.

It was a house no one had entered since I came here, but I realized how empty it felt, as if it were clearly visible.

“…Kanna.”

Ivory hair.

Violet eyes.

A gentle fragrance.

I should have stopped the heroes from taking Kanna, but I couldn’t. I had no regrets because I didn’t even have the option to do so.

Am I really a powerless being who can’t protect anything from the monster?

Am I incapable of doing anything, knowing that the barrier will collapse once more?

To find that answer, I truly need someone I wish to protect.

Yes, I need Kanna.

I couldn’t understand what this jumbled-up feeling was or the emotions that sparked contradictions, but the sound of her pained voice echoed painfully in my heart, and I wished she wouldn’t cry.

I hoped she would smile.

I wanted to ensure that Kanna, who couldn’t sleep in the dark at night, could sleep peacefully.

As I got lost in thought, my brow furrowed, the doorbell rang.

“…?”

Was there someone who would ring the doorbell at my house, regardless of the time?

I shook off my daze and approached the entrance, swinging the door open.

And, indeed.

“…Oh, hello. I’m back.”

It was Kanna.

Ch. 69 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 69

Kanna, whom I thought would remain unresponsive, returned. The fact was so surprising that I couldn’t say anything out of joy.

Holding back my swelling emotions, I offered water to Kanna, who had come inside.

Her school uniform was very clean, but apart from that, her body looked quite disheveled, creating a sense of discord.

It was difficult to gauge what she had been through. I hesitated to ask anything for fear of reopening wounds, feeling helpless.

What could have happened?

I was curious but knew this wasn’t the time to satisfy that curiosity.

As I handed her the water and stayed quiet, Kanna hesitated and picked up the cup. Swallowing the water down coolly, she placed the empty cup on the table.

For someone who looked a bit disheveled, she seemed relatively untroubled. Had the execution been postponed, and had Kanna only received a protective disposition?

Before expressing my doubts, Kanna took my hand and repeated some fidgeting gestures. I tilted my head, wondering if she was anxious.

If she had suddenly been taken and held from Monday to Friday for nearly three days, that would make sense, so I chose not to say anything.

I thought it was my job to listen to her voice when she was ready to gather her thoughts.

The silence that felt eternal ended in an instant. Kanna’s voice tickled my ears.

“I think I’m going to be okay.”

“…Really?”

“Yeah. I should have said I was coming beforehand.”

“No, no. It’s okay.”

Kanna said this and cautiously took out a device. Through her slightly trembling hands, she sighed.

“I didn’t have any contacts to tell, so I gave them your number. I’m sorry… But they said it’s a reprieve for now.”

“Reprieve?”

“Oh, um… They said they’re going to check if I’m fulfilling the totem role, and how serious the damage is because of it.”

Hearing those words complicated my feelings, but amidst that, there was also a sense of relief. It seemed they wouldn’t go to extreme measures, rummaging around looking for things haphazardly and ultimately leading to d*ath.

“…So, does that mean it’s a bit better for now?”

“If the monsters attacking have nothing to do with me, then it should be fine.”

“I see.”

Conversely, if a monster were to come for Kanna tomorrow and someone had to d*e because of it, would Kanna be executed without mercy?

I felt my mouth dry as I couldn’t control my troubling feelings.

As a somewhat awkward atmosphere lingered, I tried to shift the mood a bit by speaking up.

It felt as if this space was pushing her to say something against her will.

“Um… I was about to have a meal, do you want to wash up first?”

I worried that Kanna might feel frustrated that I had brought her this far without allowing her to wash, and I felt an urge to click my tongue in annoyance.

“Ah…”

Kanna sighed upon hearing my words.

It suddenly felt like I had said something implying she was dirty, and I felt a wave of sudden guilt.

“No, I mean, you don’t have to…”

“I couldn’t help it. I couldn’t ask someone else to wash me…”

Whether it was an explanation or an excuse, I worried that my words might have come off poorly, so I opened my mouth, but Kanna brought up something different.

She said the reason she was so dirty was that she couldn’t ask for help. But then, why should someone else have to wash her?

That thought briefly confused me, and Kanna glanced at me and extended her hand.

Her hands appeared to be ordinary, but the moment she slightly rolled up her blazer, I realized that wasn’t true.

“…What’s this?”

“They said I had limbs cut off, and the monsters made them again, so they might cut more. So that’s what I received in return.”

Kanna said with a bitter smile, but that arm was a metallic prosthetic, making it impossible for me to smile back.

Is it really okay to just cut off limbs like this? That question sprang to mind.

I reached out my trembling hand. Kanna did not pull away, and thus, our hands easily met.

Sitting across from her, holding her hand would surely make my heart race, but I felt no warmth, only the unsettling realization that her hand was merely a hollow imitation of softness, leaving me feeling faint.

“Is this… okay? This feels strange…?”

The words that came from my mouth were nothing but complaints. Even saying this wouldn’t improve the situation or bring back what was lost.

Yet, I couldn’t hide those feelings.

“…It’s strange, isn’t it?”

With that feeling, I could only painfully acknowledge the reality of being unable to do anything.

Even after hearing my voice, Kanna simply smiled silently.

Her expression seemed to say, “There was nothing I could do.” It felt like a sharp poke in my heart.

“Then, your leg too?”

“…I left part of my thigh, but yeah. It’s a bit tough to wash without the prosthetic arm.”

“I see.”

Feeling like a sinner for asking if she wanted to wash first without knowing that, I hesitated, wondering how it would work if she had to wash without the prosthetic.

She needed a lot of things, and with so much missing, I felt frustrated and indecisive.

Kanna seemed to recognize that it was a problem and was struggling with it too. And then she said,

“…Um, if you’re okay with it, could you help me?”

“Um, what?”

“Just washing my hair would be nice.”

I was taken aback.

Even with no hands or feet, it was inevitable that she had to wash herself. But without hands and feet, standing alone was unthinkable, and confronting even the temperature of the water was an enormous challenge, presenting a dire problem.

What should I do? While I was pondering this, I felt my head go blank upon hearing Kanna’s words.

“No, even so, I… But…”

I thought it might be better to ask Orca. However, Orca had family matters to attend to, so it was unrealistic to expect her to spare much time.

Trying to find someone else besides Orca was perplexing because, while I did know people, there were hardly any that Kanna could trust, making me feel even more anxious.

Should I do it myself?

I wanted to see Kanna’s state, but I questioned if I really wanted to confront her like that.

I kept hesitating.

Kanna quietly waited for my response.

“If you don’t want to, I’ll just fill a bucket and try to do it alone.”

“…Ah, no! It’ll be tough, so I’ll help you.”

In the end, I chose to help.

I knew I shouldn’t, but I couldn’t just leave Kanna alone, so I thought I would only offer help as far as I could.

Once she took off her blazer, Kanna began unbuttoning from the changing room. I could only watch from the side.

As the buttons popped open one by one, her skin came into view between the parts of her shirt.

The moment she revealed her clothes, I saw her arm, which did not appear human beneath her shoulder, looking luxuriously metallic.

It seemed equipped with high-tech devices, but I wondered if the waterproofing was ambiguous or if they were just concerned about corrosion on the outer layer.

“Are your hands just made to look human?”

“Oh, this? It’s just a shell. I can take it off, but it would attract too much attention.”

Kanna said this and then unzipped and unbuttoned her skirt.

As it helplessly fell to the floor, I noticed her pantyhose wrapped around her legs to conceal them.

As she pulled it down, she, of course, revealed only the most basic parts that could be folded, and everything below was prosthetic legs.

In such a situation, despair prevailed over excitement, leaving my feelings cold with dread.

Kanna caught a glimpse of my expression and chuckled softly.

“Well, I guess it doesn’t matter since you’ve seen it once before…?”

She seemed to be trying to lighten the mood, but there were indeed many concerns. I was startled at her lack of vigilance to this extent.

Thinking that I was the only one allowed to see this made me feel both happy and uncomfortable.

Kanna said that and then turned her back to me, cautiously removing the last of her clothing. She then quietly urged me.

“Could you hold my armpit from behind?”

“Oh, um, of course.”

As I reached out my hand, she fumbled for the button on her prosthesis and eventually wavered with a click.

Had I not placed my hand there, her body could have crashed to the ground, leaving me with a pounding heart.

“I can manage one side myself, but could you do the other?”

Watching Kanna remove her limbs one by one, I frowned.

“…Yeah.”

With one last click, she became a body unable to live without anyone’s help.

She could neither walk nor hold anything, nor even eat anymore, yet in the midst of all that, she simply smiled bitterly.

“But I still feel a bit embarrassed.”

Ch. 70 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 70

Suddenly becoming n*ked and asking someone to wash me was honestly a reluctant thing to do.

Of course, I felt more comfortable with Yoon Hamin than Orca, but that was only when the two of us were alone; I wanted to avoid any physical contact that felt like one was touching and sweeping the other.

It wasn’t as if my prosthetic arm and leg didn’t have waterproof features.

Even so, leaving washing to Yoon Hamin without doing it myself was because of me.

It wasn’t a great sight to have to trust myself to someone else, but there was no way around it.

The prosthetic arm was made of magic-friendly metal.

And I was the owner of electric abilities that sometimes went out of control.

The fear that if electricity surged during washing, not only would my body be affected, but the prosthetic, which amplified my powers, could ge me electrocuted, made me want to keep my distance.

It was not a problem with the prosthetic, but rather the fact that it was my issue that was truly unfortunate.

That said, if I didn’t have such a prosthetic, I would only be shooting lightning from the contact point between the prosthetic and my arm, so I

had no intention of using a useless prosthetic.

So, all I felt was depressed about being in a situation where I had to lose my limbs, and I couldn’t blame anyone for anything else.

If my powers didn’t go out of control, then that would be when I could depend on Yoon Hamin.

Yoon Hamin clearly looked tense.

He gulped at me, lifted the prosthetic arm that was separated from me, and then let out a sigh.

“…It’s a bit heavy. Isn’t it hard to have something like this attached?”

“It’s surprisingly okay. I can still hold other things easily, so…?”

As I shrugged my shoulders in response, Yoon Hamin looked like he was struggling with something.

Then a voice that seemed to have come out of him multiple times emerged.

“Um, aren’t you being too much about this?”

“What do you mean?”

“Me washing you.”

“…I don’t mind.”

As I tossed the words lightly back at him, Yoon Hamin’s face showed more signs of conflict.

“…But is there really no waterproof feature on this?”

He muttered to himself, seemingly overwhelmed with even washing himself.

Seeing that, I smiled bitterly and replied to a comment that wasn’t even directed at me.

“It is waterproof.”

“Uh, huh?”

“It’s waterproof, I said.”

It seemed Yoon Hamin thought I requested help because it wasn’t waterproof.

Since I had said without any words that I couldn’t wash by myself, it wasn’t surprising that he misunderstood.

“It’s just… if something goes wrong, I could d*e because of my powers, so that’s why. If it turns out impossible, I’ll wash by myself.”

“Ah, no! If it could be that dangerous, I have to help you.”

“…I’m sorry for being so stubborn.”

“No, it’s okay. Just feel free to say it.”

With that, Yoon Hamin carefully helped me.

After entering the bathroom, I was gently placed on a bathroom chair.

Without legs to support me, there was a risk of falling forward or backward, but as I teetered a bit, I quickly regained my balance before tipping over.

Staring blankly into one corner, I saw Yoon Hamin start checking the water temperature by turning on the shower.

The sound of running water made my ears perk up.

Before long, Yoon Hamin splashed some water onto his hand and lightly dripped it onto my shoulder.

“How’s that, Kanna?”

“Um, make it a little warmer.”

“Really? I thought it was warm enough.”

Yoon Hamin said this and turned the faucet again.

Then he let the water come down on me even hotter than before.

Realizing now that it was warm enough to heat my body without being scalding, I nodded.

“I guess girls like their temperature a bit higher than guys do.”

“…I don’t know.”

“I suppose that could be the case.”

I tilted my head in confusion since I wasn’t sure.

Yoon Hamin seemed to understand in his own way, but it felt like he grasped it in a different direction from mine.

There was no way he would think like me.

“I’m going to splash some water. Close your eyes.”

“Okay.”

I entrusted my body to Yoon Hamin.

The cascading water soaked me from the head down.

The warm sensation ran down from my scalp, wetting my shoulders, chest, abdomen, and thighs.

My body trembled.

It had been so long since I had felt such a sensation; it was comforting to the point of being joyous.

“Ugh, ugh…”

Even with my eyes closed, the pleasure felt from the warmth had me unable to hold back a m*an that slipped out.

My body completely relaxed.

Due to just having my limbs cut off, the tension in my muscles dissipated, and my shoulders slumped, leading my mind and body towards peace and warmth.

“Good, ugh, right there, mmm…”

Yoon Hamin’s hand was stroking my head.

He seemed to be busy rinsing my hair with one hand while holding the showerhead with the other, and I felt a bit guilty, but I liked the feeling of someone taking such care of my scalp more, so I closed my eyes.

The water stopped suddenly, and I felt the cold touch of shampoo approaching.

I couldn’t know what it felt like as I wasn’t the one washing my hair, but feeling refreshed was proof that I could pleasantly let myself go.

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After finishing washing Kanna, I couldn’t shake off my anxious feelings.

At first, I was happy. Kanna, who I thought would never come back, had returned.

Then I felt angry. How could heroes do such a thing as cut off a student’s limbs? I felt outrage, especially during the wash. I was disgusted by the idea

of heroes who aimed to perpetuate this kind of life.

But since they were claiming it was for humanity, and if this led to thousands or tens of thousands of others dying, I couldn’t ignore the greater good of removing that threat.

Because of that, I, a mere student, felt nothing but helplessness and ineptitude.

Even if I borrowed the power of the stars, I would still ultimately be just a single entity.

Feelings of joy, anger, and anxiety tangled up, capturing me in a complex web.

In the whirlpool of chaotic emotions, I groaned.

Kanna, dressed lightly, had mechanical arms and legs.

I even noticed that her fingers were mechanical, possibly because she had removed gloves like the ones that person was wearing earlier.

I had guessed she couldn’t wash herself because there was no waterproof feature, but it was frustrating to realize it was due to the lack of control over her abilities that brought danger.

I thought it might have been better to give her a prosthetic arm that didn’t respond to her powers, but I didn’t want her to waste such abilities. And before that, I wished she hadn’t received the prosthetic at all. My teeth ground painfully together.

Kanna was holding a hairdryer, diligently drying her hair.

After reattaching her limbs, seeing her back to her everyday life made my heart uneasy.

“…Kanna.”

“Yeah?”

“Never mind.”

“What is it?”

The abruptly ended conversation only created a solemn silence.

I opened my mouth, but I found it difficult to ask someone who had lost their limbs how it felt to lose them.

Closing my eyes tightly, I managed to spit out a different remark.

“…Remember earlier when you said a monster tore your arm off?”

“Yeah. That happened…”

“But if it grew back, couldn’t the monster fix that arm again?”

I swallowed nervously and spoke.

I couldn’t change the system immediately.

Without anyone’s consent, simply pounding against a system I disliked would only yield backlash, diminishing both my position and Kanna’s.

Swallowing that injustice, I struggled to find the next course of action.

As if acknowledging that, Kanna chuckled softly and replied.

“That could be possible. But I don’t want to meet that monster again.”

“…Ah, you’re right. I didn’t think that through too well.”

“No, it’s not like I haven’t thought about it.”

Kanna seemed to be quite considerate, gently raising her chin and shaking her head side to side.

Her wavy hair drew beautiful arcs before settling.

Kanna stared quietly into the mirror.

It seemed she was carefully observing what was attached to her arm.

I gazed at her intently, recalling the scenery that had just caught my eye not long ago.

Her figure, having left everything to me in the spacious bathroom, kept swirling around my mind.

I felt a rush of self-loathing.

Just moments ago, joy, anger, and powerlessness had been swirling within me, and now I was inexplicably excited, leading to my unavoidable self-loathing.

To erase that self-loathing, I hurriedly asked her a question.

“Kanna, what do you want to eat for dinner tonight?”

“Ah, I’m fine with whatever you make.”

“Really? Then I guess I should go make something.”

I fled from the scene as if escaping.

Standing in front of the cutting board, clutching my pounding heart, I found myself unable to chop anything.

My trembling hands hesitated to cut anything.

Was it because I had seen Kanna’s limbs being severed?

I couldn’t bring myself to slice even a single ingredient due to that sadness.

Ah, why?

Why was I shouting about saving someone I couldn’t save?

Monsters were eyeing her, and the greater good screamed for her d*ath.

The world seemed to declare that her d*ath was necessary for a proper life.

I didn’t want to enjoy peace at the expense of a sacrifice, especially if it were the sacrifice of someone I wanted to protect.

Even so, it didn’t mean I couldn’t understand.

When weighing one person against thousands of lives, it was naturally going to be the thousands.

Nevertheless, I wanted to save that one person.

Of course, I wasn’t dismissing the lives of thousands.

I just wanted to save everyone.

I was powerless now, but if it were before the loss, I resolved to protect them.

If I were to become a hero, I wanted to be the kind of hero who would save even those who turned their backs to ensure that everyone could survive, dreaming of safety and peace.

Ch. 71 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 71

Looking at Kanna made my heart ache.

I couldn’t fathom how a person could cut off the limbs of a student with such a bright future; it left me speechless.

I couldn’t understand what kind of emotion led Kanna to agree to have her own limbs amputated.

Countless emotions crossed my mind repeatedly, yet my mouth remained firmly shut, unable to utter a single word.

Even while eating delicious food, Kanna’s expression remained just average. After I finished washing up, seeing her quietly watching TV made me wonder what she was thinking.

I shook my head and gently approached her side; she glanced my way with a fleeting gaze.

I hesitated, looking into her cautious eyes.

Was it okay to say these things? Would I be prying into Kanna’s feelings just to satisfy my own curiosity and make myself feel a bit more comfortable?

Surely, it wasn’t anything good that was exchanged in conversation.

Would three days be enough time for her heart to heal?

Kanna, who had lost her limbs, appeared somewhat indifferent, which felt a bit frightening, leaving me at a loss for what to do.

I thought perhaps if she was in pain or crying, it would be understandable, but I still would want to help her avoid crying and suffering further.

Yet, this calmness made it impossible for me to ask her anything.

If she had already gathered her heart and organized her thoughts while I wasn't looking, and if she had cut off and given up even the feelings she once held, then wouldn't my intrusion cause her pain?

"…Are you okay?"

I was a coward.

I liked to jump into other situations, ready to help, but at that moment, I was worried about hurting her heart, so I treaded carefully.

"What do you mean?"

Kanna tilted her head in confusion.

"…Just, you know, different things."

"Ah."

But no matter how I tried to beat around the bush, or omit subjects, Kanna wasn't foolish.

It was as if she understood what I wanted to say as she lifted her right arm slightly.

The synthetic arm, which had no pretense of being a human hand, made a heavy metallic sound.

"This? I'm fine."

If she were even a little more honest and had said that she was actually frustrated and struggling, we could have exchanged various words, but her bitter smile dismissed all those opportunities.

While she might really be okay, I couldn’t help but feel that if she completely gave up, she would end up giving up on herself in the long run.

Hadn’t she, before, made a voice asking to be put to d*ath, holding back tears after being consumed by fear?

She might have thought it better to do this than to drag others into her plight.

There was no need for such sacrifice, yet Kanna was trying to cut herself away.

I admired that fact while at the same time wanting to shake my head and tell her that it shouldn’t be that way.

“Really?”

I couldn’t even bring myself to say to the one who claims to be okay that she is actually not okay. So we just fell into awkward silence afterward.

Following Kanna’s gaze, I turned to the TV.

As usual, the news was playing.

I found myself questioning whether Kanna was interested in the news as well.

I’d heard that girls watch a lot of dramas, but wondered if Kanna fit that stereotype, and briefly got lost in thought.

It didn’t take long for me to remember the example of Orca and dismiss the thought.

There were stories of traffic accidents at the terminal, medical malfeasance, and various other discussions.

There was even news of an agency mistreating a hero, making the atmosphere in this living room, where Kanna and I, aspiring heroes, sat, feel a bit chilly.

Awkwardly shifting my gaze, I found Kanna looking at the screen unfazed.

Not sensing my gaze, her eyes seemed to be focused on the TV, and I couldn’t pull my eyes away.

As her violet pupils reflected the TV screen, they appeared even more beautiful.

In the quiet space, Kanna’s voice suddenly broke through.

“…Hamin.”

“Uh, yeah?”

“What would you do if a monster broke through the barrier and everyone died?”

I flinched at the sound of her calling my name. I then felt my body stiffen at her following statement.

Was the fear she felt of that nature? I tilted my head in confusion.

Soon enough, I understood why she had posed that question.

[…The barrier has collapsed, but with the support of various families led by the Lamiris family, the reconstruction of the barrier has been successful. While it remains unclear how the monsters broke through the barrier, the Lamiris family has stated they will build a stronger barrier for the safety and peace of the citizens.]

In the span of about a month, the barrier has collapsed three times already, and many people and heroes perished fighting against it.

Silence followed Kanna’s question, and it was filled with the mourning pouring from the TV.

The names of countless individuals were listed, with the final names of heroes poignantly inscribed.

The TV stated, “No details have been revealed,” but within the numerous associations, many heroes had likely been discussing it already.

Kanna must have been aware of her existence and that a totem helps monsters enter the barrier.

Yet, saying such things could be because she didn’t want to create further confusion.

However, it was clear that wouldn’t last long.

Once again, the barrier would crumble, and the monsters would invade inside.

Kanna was aware of this, and thus, she felt fear.

The most terrifying moment for humanity that was bound to come.

So, I paused to consider Kanna’s question before finally speaking.

“…Do you think they would really break in like that?”

“I don’t know.”

Kanna shrugged as if she wasn’t sure.

Even if I attached a hypothetical to my question, it was merely a speculation based on the worst-case scenario, which is probably why she responded that way.

Sometimes, there were moments when I wished to understand Kanna but simply could not.

Of course, anyone could have such worries, but sometimes I felt a chill when her eyes seemed to gaze somewhere far away.

It felt like she was seeing something different.

So, I leaned in to see if she had sensed anything this time.

But no questions or answers returned in response.

The silence dragged on as bedtime approached, and I changed my position.

Even while lying in bed, I mulled over Kanna's earlier words repeatedly.

The moment the barrier protecting this time crumbled, obliterating the boundary between inside and outside.

With no walls to protect us, people would d*e at the hands of monsters.

When the hope of heroes was shattered and the despair of people turned into screams piercing the sky.

Even without witnessing it firsthand, I couldn't help but think of it as hell.

That kind of horrific moment was something I could never accept.

I gazed at Kanna, who had slipped into the space beside me as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Kanna glanced at me and cautiously asked.

"…Is your arm uncomfortable?"

"Ah, no, I'm fine."

It seemed she was concerned about the coldness of her prosthetic arm brushing against mine.

I shook my head in denial and gently pulled the blanket over her.

Then, I formulated a response to the question Kanna had thrown at me.

“…Kanna.”

“Yeah?”

“About what you said earlier while watching TV.”

“Earlier? Oh, that.”

Kanna tilted her head slightly as if trying to remember what she had said, then quickly nodded as if she realized.

I had pondered several times before bringing this answer forth.

The reason Kanna posed that question.

The thoughts leading up to her question.

And what answer would put her heart at ease.

As I stirred under the blanket, I turned my head slightly to meet Kanna’s gaze.

Kanna also glanced at my eyes.

In that moment, looking into her eyes, I whispered.

“…I will do everything to make sure such an event never occurs. I will become a great hero for that. So that you won’t have to suffer anymore, I will make it happen.”

“I’m fine.”

“What do you mean you’re fine… It happened like this, and yet…”

I clenched my teeth.

I tightened my fists.

To be honest, who was I to say anything? I was just a classmate; it felt strange to act like I was doing this for her sake.

Of course, I could say friends are precious, but that line of friendship often felt like it was pushing me away, telling me, “You’re only this far in.”

If I got closer, I felt I could protect her,

That I could prevent this from happening.

But that was not happening, and it was so frustrating.

How could I shake off this suffocating feeling?

“You’re clearly the one who is struggling the most; why are you the most composed…?”

Unintentionally, my voice was filled with rising emotion.

Kanna’s eyes widened as she heard my voice.

For the first time today, the expression that had been sinking all day was the most lively it had been.

I pressed on, speaking to her who was staring blankly at me.

“I have no idea why you can be so composed after losing your limbs. How can you accept this? Is it for the greater good? Is it because of the mindset of a hero, or something like that?”

I pleaded for her to please understand this incomprehensible emotion I felt.

It was almost as if I was pouring out my feelings.

I was scared of the calmness that was hardly seen even among other heroes.

Accepting it with the mindset of “I have to be like this even without arms and legs” felt like a disconnect to me.

My expression naturally twisted in discontent.

Kanna saw this, opened her mouth quietly, then closed it again.

As I looked at her closed lips without any words, a feeling of frustration lingered.

I felt resentful towards her for not speaking to me at all.

Ch. 72 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 72

Lying in bed and listening to Yoon Hamin’s question, my mind felt unsettled.

The story’s beginning lay with me. I had posed the question of what would happen if the barrier collapsed and humanity faced extinction.

Yoon Hamin, naturally, responded that such a thing wouldn’t happen, like a true protagonist.

I had thought about it before, but I was taken aback that he would say he would do it for my sake.

So, I said it was okay.

If Yoon Hamin were to save me in a dangerous moment, I would be happy. But it was something that shouldn’t happen for him to make me the goal.

And whether it triggered something or not, Yoon Hamin asked me with a choked voice that sounded like he might cry at any moment.

He asked why I remained so calm.

Due to my missing limbs, it seemed Yoon Hamin had his own concerns for me. I couldn’t deny it; honestly, I could have asked out of curiosity, but I had tried to avoid the topic, and that allowed me to feel at ease for a moment.

Now it seemed there was a limit to that, as he demanded an answer from me.

I thought I had told him many things, but what was it that he still wanted to hear?

I remained silent, and the silence lingered. Yoon Hamin frowned and eventually turned away. His gaze toward the ceiling felt like he was giving up on something, and that made me want to cry.

So, I had no choice but to speak again.

“There’s nothing like that.”

What Yoon Hamin had held in his mouth.

A higher cause? The heart of a hero? Such things could not possibly exist. I hadn’t come here to become a hero.

I probably died once and opened my eyes here.

This second life I was forced to live, it was one of the stories I had seen. It felt like just yesterday that I was trembling, unable to endure the environment I was placed in.

To suddenly gain a heroic mindset after being in an academy where future heroes walked, just because of an unexpectedly given environment? That made it all the more strange.

I must have been an odd person from the start.

“…There’s nothing like that, like a higher cause or a hero’s mindset.”

“Then why…?”

Once I realized where I was, who I was, and who stood before me, I was able to set a goal.

I didn’t know if this sudden life was a last glimpse before d*ath, but for now, I thought I would live this life. With the thought that there would be no next time, I resolved to let go of any lingering regrets, even in a place like this.

Thus, my first goal was to live.

And if I found room to spare, my second wish was for Yoon Hamin to smile.

Just as I had gained strength by cheering for him, I wanted him to smile with my help before he cried. I wanted to see him rise above adversity with strength gained from my encouragement.

Since coming here, I felt like I was following ‘Kanna’s’ fate, and the time of my d*ath was drawing nearer, but if I had to d*e like that, I wanted to prepare for a future where Yoon Hamin could be as happy as possible.

He was my hero, after all. Because he was the protagonist, I could find strength.

Therefore, what could make me move like this was nothing other than that. A higher cause or a hero’s mindset. Such things were beyond my concern.

“I’m not calm at all. I’m in pain. …I just didn’t want to talk about it.”

“……I’m sorry.”

As I slightly furrowed my brow, Yoon Hamin widened his eyes and immediately apologized to me. He was at a loss for words, his gaze wandering.

I continued speaking to him.

The story he most wanted to hear. And the story he least wanted to hear.

“I had to accept it. I was so scared I sometimes wished to d*e or thought of giving everything up, but if I could live, I figured it was better to accept it this way.”

I lifted my arm slightly from between the blankets.

Instead of soft, white skin, dark, cold metal was illuminated by the light seeping in from outside.

The fact that my lifeless, inorganic arm moved of its own accord still felt strange. Maybe it was due to the sensation transplants, but it felt comfortable to move my arm.

However, it wasn't good to have become this way.

"…If I could avoid being chased by monsters by having it cut off, I thought that would be enough to accept it, but once it was done, I regretted it."

As I gazed at my arm with a bitter expression, Yoon Hamin quietly listened to my words.

"It's strange, isn't it? In the end, my choices were to either d*e or cut it off, so what is there to regret? I don't know."

"That's… isn't it wrong to have to make such a choice? It's not enough to research other ways to save lives…"

"When I think about people who died because of me, it's not easy to say that."

I accepted the guilt.

It was only natural to be unable to bear it, but there had been thousands of sacrifices. That vague notion somehow felt a little comforting to me. I realized again that I could bear it precisely because of my ignorance.

Then, I remembered the moment I cried after the surgery when I saw the limbs attached to my body.

A strange sensation. It felt like my arm was moving, but it simultaneously felt like it wasn't mine.

Between that dissonance, I felt despair, wondering if I had to live like this.

But even so, being able to live like this was a form of relief.

Amidst the ebb and flow of emotions, I learned how to give up.

I told myself countless times that it was unavoidable.

It was unavoidable; there were no other choices.

Thus, after dedicating two entire days to myself, I could barely endure.

I was able to appear calm before Yoon Hamin, but…

I resented Yoon Hamin.

Just a moment ago, I was grateful that he was trying to steer clear of this topic, but suddenly bringing up memories I wanted to bury made me feel like I couldn’t help but resent him.

Lying down, tears streamed from my eyes, flowing toward my ears.

With a tingling sensation, I clenched my fist and naturally wiped my face.

A cold, hard touch brushed past me.

“I’m not calm at all… I cut off my limbs to live, so how can I be calm? I’m in pain too…”

Facing this cold sensation brought forth an overwhelming surge of emotions that pounded in my chest.

Tears began to trickle down, and soon they flowed out uncontrollably, surpassing what I could contain with my hands.

My voice filled with water. I felt my nose tinging.

There was no way to relieve this feeling at that moment, so I simply swallowed.

“…Kanna.”

Yoon Hamin pulled the blankets off and sat up. He looked down at me like that.

I avoided looking into his golden eyes shining through the darkness.

I didn’t want to show him this. My original goal was to pretend to be calm, go through my daily life, and encourage him when he struggled, so I didn’t understand how it had come to this.

“…Don’t look.”

So, I said that to him.

Though I had told him not to look, it was I who turned my head. I was just embarrassed and tired to face his gaze.

I didn’t want to confront those eyes that kept telling me to lean on them.

I was already leaning, but I didn’t understand how much further I was supposed to lean.

Did he want me to completely lean on him mentally? Yet I had no confidence that I could handle that until the end.

If it were to continue like this, I would probably d*e like a sacrificial lamb, implying that I was gradually heading toward ruin like ‘Kanna’. I worried that if I died after settling in a corner of Yoon Hamin’s heart, he would feel pain from my departure.

So, I tightly closed my trembling lips and exhaled deeply through my nose.

Yoon Hamin, as if he hadn’t listened to my words, hesitated before opening his mouth.

“Kanna. If it’s hard, just say so. I’ll make sure next time…”

His words trailed off.

It seemed he realized that even if he said he wouldn’t let it be like this next time, nothing remained to change that.

I knew too. There was no going back, and there was no ‘next time’ for me.

But it seemed Yoon Hamin wanted to say something different, and he swallowed again before continuing.

“Next time, I won’t let you cry.”

“…….”

“I’m sorry. I’ve only made it worse.”

“…….”

“I’m truly sorry.”

Even amidst the continued silence and our gazes not meeting, he persistently continued speaking to me after I had turned my head away. He quietly apologized.

I resented that so much that I flinched and trembled.

“If you’re sorry, then let’s just stop for now.”

That was all I could say.

Yoon Hamin shouldn’t be so concerned for me.

In fact, my situation was the problem itself.

He had people and relationships to protect.

Wasn’t I the one ruining everything?

Should I start pushing him away?

Should I distance myself?

With those thoughts, I closed my eyes, turning my back on Yoon Hamin. He hesitated for a moment before responding, “Uh-huh.” and cautiously lay back down.

“…Thank you.”

This feeling was real.

I couldn’t be happier knowing that someone was doing this for me.

“Okay.”

Yoon Hamin’s voice seemed to carry a hint of joy.

I thought that was enough.

My body felt heavy. I frowned at the sunlight pouring in through the window.

Trying to respond to the sunlight urging me to get up, I attempted to rise, but my body felt heavy.

It wouldn’t move at all. My arms and legs seemed unresponsive.

I began to breathe heavily.

Where are my arms? Where are my legs?

Where did they go? Where, where?

Ah, ah, just a minute.

Desperately raising my head, I cast my gaze upon my body.

And then, I took in the ugly sight of my torso, left alone without anything.

I don’t want to, I don’t want to live like this.

I didn’t ask for this appearance.

Not at all, I’m not calm.

Even if I lived, I didn’t want to live in such a pitiful manner.

“Aah, aahhh!”

No, I don’t want to, I don’t want to.

I screamed like that.

*

“Aahhh!”

It was instantaneous.

Kanna suddenly screamed, and I was drenched in cold sweat to the point that my clothes felt damp.

I jumped up and reached out my hand toward the screaming Kanna.

Then, I held her and quietly reassured her.

“It’s okay, it’s okay…”

“My arms, my legs…!”

“…….”

I couldn’t say “They’re fine,” since what was attached were only the prosthetic arm and leg, so I kept my mouth shut.

A bitter taste lingered behind my closed lips.

“…It’s, it’s a nightmare.”

I wished it were a nightmare instead.

I just wanted to see her vibrant smile.

Ch. 73 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 73

Kanna is in last place because she is Kanna. No matter how much I study, there are things I just can’t do. Anyway, I’m going to fail in the practical exam, so what’s the use of the written test? Having something to blame was my only refuge.

Even though that was really just a cowardly escape, it was also miserable to think that I had to endure through that somehow.

Even so, I wanted to resist to that extent.

I knew that I would eventually hit my limits someday, but I thought that it wouldn’t be right now, so I tried to struggle.

But it was as if a line was drawn saying, “This is as far as you go,” cutting off my legs so I couldn’t run, and severing my arms so I couldn’t hold on to anything, leaving me as someone who could do nothing.

I felt like I could run more, like I just needed to grab that one thing.

I couldn’t go where I wanted to, couldn’t do what I wanted to, and I felt so resentful and unable to bear having to rely on others for everything that I got up.

As I suddenly stood up, Yoon Hamin was looking at me with sad eyes.

My gaze wavered. I took a deep breath to steady my rapidly rising breath, but his intense gaze toward me made me feel uneasy.

After glancing at him once, I lowered my head.

“……”

I can’t say my arms and legs were attached, but it wasn’t like I was completely motionless.

While I was asleep, it felt like my consciousness had briefly shut off, so the metal of my prosthetic arm and leg felt even heavier.

Cold sweat was dripping down, making my entire body wet.

I could feel the sweat trickling down my spine, tickling my back.

I moaned for a moment, hesitating about what to say, and eventually answered what I thought was appropriate.

“…Hi, did you sleep well?”

Trying my best to act nonchalant, even though I’d woken up like this, I pretended it was just a trivial nightmare, tucked my hair behind my ear, and tried to get out of bed.

But Yoon Hamin grabbed my arm and stopped me from leaving.

Startled and held back, I slightly turned my head to look at Yoon Hamin, who was holding my arm.

“Why?”

“I just thought you seemed to be struggling… should I bring you some water?”

“Uh, no… I’m just going to wash up first.”

“Okay.”

Yoon Hamin didn’t say anything more and let go of my hand.

After grabbing a piece of clothing from the suitcase, I stopped in front of the changing room.

Seeing my pale face in the mirror made it painfully obvious that I didn’t look good.

If I stayed like this, I’d just end up making Yoon Hamin worry more.

So, I took off my clothes to wash away my sweaty body.

Without thinking, I entered the bathroom and turned on the tap in front of the sink.

As I watched the water pouring down, I unconsciously reached out my hand and suddenly froze.

What I was extending was nothing other than my prosthetic arm.

Ah, right. I don’t have a hand.

It was a prosthetic arm, and my ability isn’t under control right now, so isn’t it dangerous?

Maybe it would be okay for a moment? But isn’t it still dangerous even for a moment?

I hesitated for a moment, but eventually sighed, thinking it was madness to weigh the life I barely clung to against the absence of my limbs, and I had no choice but to step back out.

I grabbed the clothes I had left to change from the laundry basket and put them on quickly.

After that, when I stepped out, Yoon Hamin was standing slightly away from me.

“What’s up? Why are you here? Waiting for your turn?”

“No, I was just worried about you…”

“I’m fine. I’m just looking for that.”

“For what?”

“For that thing you made look like a hand before.”

I raised my hand and alternated between making a half fist and opening it.

Then Yoon Hamin let out an “ah” and suddenly turned on his heel.

Before I could even think about where I had put it, he returned to me and extended his hand.

In his hand was a glove that looked like human skin.

I’m not sure if it should be called a glove or leather, but I thought it might serve a waterproof purpose to some extent.

Wearing long clothing that covered my arms would hide the mechanical parts, and the hand part would look like a human hand, so it wouldn’t matter. But wearing something like this with just a half-sleeve shirt seemed to create a sense of dissonance.

But what could I do? If I wanted to wash my face by myself, I had no choice but to do this.

“By the way, why this suddenly?”

“I just want to wash my face a little.”

As I answered like that, I slipped my hand into his.

Once it was fitted snugly, it truly looked like a human hand.

I felt like I understood why the fingers of the prosthetic hand were made a little thinner.

“If anything feels uncomfortable, let me know.”

“Well, it’s just washing my face. I’m fine.”

Waving my hand to reassured Yoon Hamin, who seemed to worry a lot, I went back inside with a sagging mouth.

When I’m left alone in a space where no one can see me, there’s no reason to keep a smile.

Even if I had a gloomy expression or a tired-looking face when alone, it was okay since no one would worry anyway.

With that, I trudged back to grab a towel to wipe off the sweat after taking off my clothes again.

I walked to the sink and looked up at the mirror.

Ivory hair and violet eyes looked back at me.

What am I hoping for?

Do I really want no one to worry about me? Is all the attention I get all too tiresome?

Am I, who has endured in that ambiguous environment of indifference and sarcasm, hoping for that?

It wasn’t.

But I felt a little overwhelmed by the signals Yoon Hamin sent my way.

“…Ah.”

Am I breaking Yoon Hamin?

That was the same worry I had just before closing my eyes yesterday.

If that were the case, how could I rewrite this story if Yoon Hamin became someone I didn’t know?

I shouldn’t feel this way; maybe it would have been best to just stay quiet like the original ‘Kanna’ and twist the story at the very end before dying.

I pondered and conflicted repeatedly.

Was I someone who couldn’t protect anything?

Not Yoon Hamin, not even those around me, and not even myself.

That sadness reflected back at me through the mirror.

That sorrowful expression, steeped in despair, seemed like it would hurt someone else.

Of course, most people wouldn’t care about whatever expression I made, but since I had someone to worry about, like Yoon Hamin or Orca, it was something I had to be mindful of.

“Let’s smile…”

I forced my trembling lips to lift.

But perhaps because I forced it, the smile didn’t look good.

A distorted smile, behind which I was crying. I was also smiling.

I wanted to say, “Don’t worry about me,” but I wasn’t okay at all, and it felt like tears would spill out.

So, I turned the cold water on and washed my face.

I tried to wash away the tears that burned my heart, but I couldn’t stop what was burning in my heart.

Again and again, and again.

I splashed water on my face repeatedly.

Only when my face became a bit numb from the cold did I stop and look back at the mirror.

Then I smiled a little more naturally than before.

I felt relieved, thinking that now I had a face to show Yoon Hamin.

*

Twenty minutes after Kanna went in. It felt like a long time to be washing up, and I wondered if she was taking a bath since morning, but that wasn't it, as she came out just having changed her top, walking slowly.

Well, if she wanted to take a bath or a shower, she would have looked for me.

Though it wasn't that it couldn't be waterproof, the fact that there was a risk of Kanna being electrocuted while washing due to her poor control of her ability and the amplifying function of her prosthetic arm was critical.

I heard that Kanna was the type to skip breakfast, so I prepared something simple on purpose.

I couldn't just have it for myself, so I made an effort to at least present a variety.

"Kanna, if you're done washing up, let's have breakfast."

"Aren't you washing up?"

"I'm going to wash up after I eat."

What I presented to Kanna was pancakes and syrup.

And I placed an orange next to it for her to snack on. I thought I would peel it for her after her meal.

Wiping her face with a towel draped over her neck, Kanna looked at the pancakes with slightly tired eyes and sat down, placing the towel on the

chair beside her.

Sitting across from her, as she reached for the fork and kn*fe, her expression seemed somewhat awkward.

It looked like she was trying to smile, but her eyes didn’t seem to reflect that.

“……”

The kn*fe cut through the pancake and hit the plate.

The fork brought the soft flavor of the pancake, along with its texture, to her mouth.

Kanna chewed without saying much.

“It’s delicious.”

Just like before.

After having a nightmare, she must have felt heavy in body and mind, yet she first tried to say she was okay and wanted to escape from it.

Yesterday was the same.

Even when she wasn’t okay, she forced herself to say she was fine, turning away from the sorrow she faced while insisting that she was okay.

But I knew.

I knew that she wasn’t truly okay.

Ch. 74 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 74

Emotions are tightly hidden within, and if they are not brought out and revealed, there would be no way for others to know them.

Expressing emotions is easy, yet some people refrain from doing so due to feeling awkward or embarrassed.

If Kanna were to be one of those types of people, it didn’t seem that way.

She wasn’t clumsy when it came to expressing her emotions.

How could one say she was clumsy at expressing emotions when she would say she’s having a hard time when she was, and cry when she was sad?

What could possibly be the reason for someone like her to hide her emotions?

I could only sigh as I couldn’t grasp that nuance.

Trying to forcefully pry out the emotions of someone who hides them would clearly lead to some form of hurt.

Just like how forcing open a locked box could cause some part of it to warp, pressure would be applied somewhere, leading to wounds.

So I couldn’t say anything more to Kanna, who consistently insisted that she was okay.

I didn’t think she was okay.

If she really were, she wouldn’t have those sad eyes.

I could only wait quietly.

I planned to create a comfortable space for her until she truly felt the need for help and asked me for it, as I went about my ordinary day-to-day life.

I had no desire to forcefully approach or make her uncomfortable by revealing her emotions, so I intended to tread carefully.

“If you’re okay, then…”

It felt unfortunate to have to say such a thing, knowing that she wasn’t okay.

I repeated to myself that it couldn’t be helped and wrapped up breakfast.

After that, Kanna cleared the dishes without saying anything, and I blankly watched her.

As I hesitated, Kanna casually picked up some rubber gloves.

“…Uh? What are you doing?”

“I’m going to wash the dishes.”

“Why? I’ll do it.”

“I’ve been living off you, so I should at least do this. Plus, you’re washing for me.”

Hearing that made my heart race.

I felt my face get hot.

I didn’t intend to suggest splitting household chores just because I had invited Kanna here.

However, whether Kanna thought that way or not, she began organizing the dishes in the sink wearing the rubber gloves.

Behind the clattering sounds, Kanna’s hair swayed gently.

After realizing that it was bothering her, Kanna let out a small sigh.

She then quietly opened her mouth.

“…I’m sorry, but could you pass me the string in my blazer pocket?”

“Ah, okay.”

I quickly found Kanna’s blazer and retrieved the string from the pocket.

When I returned, Kanna had already started washing the dishes.

As she washed the dishes under the pouring water, she glanced at the hair tie I had slyly extended into her line of sight and turned her head toward me.

“Just tie it up loosely.”

“Uh, okay?”

Kanna paused her hands and lightly gripped the sink.

Then she tilted her head back, as if asking to have her hair tied up gently.

Her hair emitted a pleasant scent.

The bright ivory color, now close, made the eyes feel soft.

I hesitated for a moment, unsure of how to proceed, and looped the string around my fingers and caught her hair with the same hand.

With my other hand, I gathered the stray strands and pushed them into the

hand holding the string, and at the moment I thought it was all together, I tightened the string and pulled her hair through.

It was a bit clumsy, but it was gathered enough not to be uncomfortable for her.

“Is it done?”

“Yeah, thanks.”

Kanna said that and then shook her hair from side to side.

Her hair, tied like a ponytail, created a fluttering wave, and Kanna, having paused, continued with the dishes.

I stood silently, hearing the clattering sounds.

As I intently looked at Kanna’s back, I cautiously opened my mouth.

“Kanna, um, I’m going to clean, so when you finish, do you want to study with me?”

“Yeah, got it.”

Kanna nodded her head.

Feeling relieved by her response, I moved to fetch the vacuum cleaner.

Now, some time has passed, and I found myself sitting across from Kanna at the table in the living room, preparing to study.

Kanna seemed slightly uncomfortable, as if trying to get used to the new sensation, gripping her pen and groaning.

Even before starting, I couldn’t take my eyes off her.

Watching her effort to appear as natural as possible while holding a single pen made me wonder how much she was suffering inside.

“I think this feels like what it was.”

Kanna finally held the pen naturally one last time and made a quick motion with it.

I wondered if she planned to wear gloves that looked like her hands when she went to the Academy; practicing with those seemed impressive.

Despite the overwhelming sense of loss from having lost something immediately, seeing her act as if nothing was wrong, while I knew she felt more depressed and sad than anyone, made my heart ache in return.

Seeing someone obviously in pain insist that they are fine adds to the observer’s heartache.

“It’s pretty good.”

“Really? Then I should hold it like this.”

With my help, Kanna nodded and began to line up meaningless letters in her notebook.

After writing a bit, she nodded her head, as if she had caught on.

“I think I can start to do it slowly now.”

“Then what should we start with… Kanna, you were the weakest in history, right?”

“Uh, yeah.”

“Then let’s start with this.”

I pulled out a history book from the stack of books.

Kanna seemed somewhat ordinary, yet also fell into an unusual category.

She showed some strength in subjects like language and math, but was a typical student who couldn’t apply herself in the history portion.

However, seeing her manage to keep up with the newly added geography class made me wonder what her interests might truly be.

I thought history and geography were somewhat related, but maybe not.

“Kanna, do you know this? Why were barriers erected?”

“…I know that.”

“Then do you know who erected them?”

“Saint Lamiris.”

It seemed she had studied somewhat, seeing her retrieve an answer as if recalling some of it, which brought a smile to my face.

“Then the hero who drove away the monsters and found peace.”

Kanna hesitated for a moment at that question.

I thought it might be understandable if she didn’t know the answer, so I gave a slight chuckle.

“The hero who drove away the monsters that inflicted massive damage on people due to the Unrefined Magical Power terror numbered five.”

I provided a hint and waited again.

However, Kanna just stared blankly.

After a while, she quietly opened her mouth.

Although she spoke her answer, it felt like she was thinking of something else, which left me with a strange feeling.

“…Are you perhaps not in the mood to study?”

Honestly, I thought that could be the case.

It was my suggestion to study, and Kanna, who had not been okay yesterday or now, might just be forcing herself to sit here saying she was.

Right before breakfast, she had been without her arms and legs, and I still couldn’t shake off the image of her waking up abruptly, searching for her limbs as if she had a nightmare.

Upon hearing my question, Kanna seemed to snap back to reality, her eyes wide open as she turned her head toward me.

“Oh, no, I’m okay.”

“No. If it’s hard, let’s take a little break. There’s no need to force it like this. Next week isn’t a test, so let’s take it slow.”

“…Okay.”

Kanna hesitated for a moment but then nodded.

We were already nearing the middle of April.

Time seemed to be flying by.

Moreover, as I looked at her limbs, it felt utterly nonsensical how time was flowing.

“Kanna, if you’re uncomfortable, say so anytime. Let me know if you need help; I’ll help you with everything.”

“Haha… just, right now it’s enough that you’re helping me wash.”

Kanna smiled awkwardly as she said that.

And just as I felt, perhaps she too was a bit embarrassed, as her face slightly flushed.

“…I’ll ask you to help me a bit more until I get better at controlling my abilities.”

“Okay, got it.”

Seeing Kanna embarrassed made me feel a little embarrassed myself.

It was clear that we weren’t just ordinary friends; yet it was also awkward to say anything too distant, making for a strangely ambiguous situation.

As this awkwardness lingered, words naturally faded away.

“Oh, it’s hot. Want to have some juice?”

“Yeah.”

So I hurriedly stood up to escape the situation.

I took the juice out of the refrigerator, filled two glasses, and brought them to Kanna.

After taking a refreshing sip, Kanna squinted her eyes and let out a small “Pfft.”

“Are you okay?”

“I think I’ll be okay now.”

Kanna smiled like that.

Seeing her made me smile awkwardly as I gulped down the juice in response.

After sitting quietly, Kanna placed her cup down and quietly spoke.

“Hamin.”

The way she called my name felt weighted with significance.

I became a bit nervous, wondering what she was about to say.

As I quietly waited, Kanna continued speaking softly.

“…I’m sorry for before.”

“What for?”

“For asking you to k*ll me.”

Hearing that made me freeze.

“I think I was too selfish.”

Kanna had an expression that seemed resigned.

I wanted to tell her not to have any expectations like that, but seeing her let go of something made me uneasy.

“…Why? Why are you suddenly saying that?”

I felt a little anxious.

I didn’t want her to be holding onto something, but seeing her look resigned or given up made me worry.

Being beside Kanna felt like a conflicting mess of emotions constantly clashing, which was quite bothersome.

Kanna, hearing my question, seemed to think for a moment before speaking.

“Should I say it’s no longer necessary…?”

Upon hearing that, I felt my breath catch.

A sensation seemed to wrap around my throat.

“…Suddenly? Why?”

I knew repeatedly asking why might annoy her, but I had no choice.

My mouth kept asking “why” repeatedly.

Kanna merely smiled at me with a bittersweet expression.

“…Because you’re here?”

Was she saying that because I had promised to protect her?

Yet, at that moment, I could not prevent the heroes from taking her away, even when they suspected her. She could have been executed, and I couldn’t stop it.

If she thought she could avoid d*ath because she trusted me, I would have truly appreciated it; but in reality, all I felt was bitterness swirling in my mouth.

I couldn’t help but think, perhaps she was saying she now had the courage to d*e on her own.

Ch. 75 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 75

I felt anxious the entire time we were together.

As Saturday passed and the moment became Sunday, I couldn’t help but feel uneasy.

If I look at it as objectively as possible, her actions showed the appearance of someone who was just fine, and she was acting accordingly. However, through that conversation yesterday, I keenly realized that I couldn’t take it that way.

With you here, there was no reason for me to ask to be killed.

That single statement carried a heavy meaning.

It was something that could be understood by asking in detail, but in reality, I was too scared to delve deeper and avoided doing so.

I promised to protect her, and if Kanna firmly believed that she would be safe leaning on that, then that would indeed be a joy.

If that were the case, I could be glad that Kanna said to me, “Because you are here.”

But what if it wasn’t?

If she was just prepared to cut off so much that she was even ready to sever her own life at the end of it, what was I supposed to do?

I wished someone would give me that answer.

If I were to stop her by force, I could do it. I could hold her arms, trip her legs, and pin her down with strength.

When she said she was suffering and wanted to d*e alone without harming anyone anymore, I was even considering removing her prosthetic arm if necessary.

But then I started to question whether she would truly give up if I prevented her in that way.

It wasn’t possible to stick close to her for 24 hours and monitor her every move, and trying to do so that way would surely just leave us both devastated.

So, what was I supposed to do?

I thought of the answer many times, and the answer I came up with was primal yet the most effective method.

Providing psychological comfort.

It was about ensuring she felt secure and would not make extreme choices on her own.

But the problem was that while effective, it was also extremely difficult.

After dinner, once Kanna finished the dishes, I, who had been doing the laundry during that time, felt my mind go blank.

It seemed like the time I spent lost in thought was increasing as I had too many things to think about.

Thinking that it was already time to go to the Academy tomorrow made the flow of time feel frustratingly cruel.

As I stared at the nearly finished washing machine, I heard a knock on the door.

“Oh, come in.”

Kanna knocked, possibly because she finished washing the dishes, and I opened the door for her from the inside.

I wasn’t there to wash up or change clothes, so I could easily let her in.

As I opened the door, Kanna timidly stepped inside.

Then, glancing at me, she pouted slightly and asked me.

“…Um, could you wash me again today?”

She had asked me this yesterday and the day before, but it always seemed to make her shy at these times.

No matter how much we were friends, I didn’t touch her body, so maybe that was why.

Kanna seemed awkward, and I felt awkward too, but I realized there was nothing we could do about it, so I just kept my mouth shut and nodded.

Kanna removed her prosthetic arm and prosthetic leg one by one.

I helped with the last prosthetic arm, and then led her into the bathroom.

Swallowing hard, I carefully seated her on the chair, washed her hair, and gently wiped her back with a towel I had squeezed some body wash onto.

As I pushed against her soft skin, Kanna’s body tilted forward.

There were no words. Beyond the softly heard sound of water, I could only hear the sound of me cleaning her body.

I couldn’t know the proper sensation because of the towel, but the pressure I felt stayed with me, making it unforgettable.

Each time I unconsciously rubbed her body, I felt somewhat like a madman.

“…Yoon Hamin.”

“Oh, sorry.”

I gathered my thoughts again and continued washing her body.

As much as she trusted me, I wanted to keep my personal feelings aside, but there were limits to that, so I could only feel grateful that she was turning her back to me.

*

It wasn’t easy to allow someone else to touch one’s body.

Especially relying on someone during moments when one has to wash thoroughly.

I thought that I could trust Yoon Hamin with that, but, as expected, feeling it wasn’t as refreshing as I had hoped.

There was nothing I could do about it; if she wanted to wash on her own, she needed to at least have better control over her abilities, so I had no choice but to endure it for now.

Letting out a sigh, I reattached her prosthetic arm and leg and changed clothes.

“…Yoon Hamin?”

I turned my head.

After I helped her put on her prosthetic limbs, I found myself standing alone in the dressing room.

Looking through the translucent glass of the bathroom, I could see Yoon Hamin standing there with the water running.

“Oh, I was going to wash up too…! I was thinking about taking a bath.”

“I see…”

I nodded my head.

Now that I thought about it, I should have asked if I could use the bathtub too.

After putting on my clothes and coming out of the dressing room, I dried my hair with a towel and looked around.

I sighed softly, feeling the repetition of the days, yesterday and today.

I couldn’t know how much time I had left.

In the first place, it wasn’t dying over my own issues, but due to the whims of a monster, so it was something I had to accept.

I recalled the monster showing me how to create totems at the Academy.

Realizing that I could make them here anytime, and that there was no limit to the number I could create, sent a chill down my spine.

No matter how much I raged against erasing the totems, I couldn’t erase all totems before the monster came crashing in, and moreover, if I didn’t d*e myself, things wouldn’t be resolved.

A sigh escaped my lips.

I worried about what to do next, but for now, I just had to put it off.

Even if I drew it closer, there wasn’t much I could resolve alone.

Suddenly, recalling the events of yesterday and today, I looked at the closed bathroom door.

A small laugh escaped me.

Speaking of which, Yoon Hamin had tried to raise the grades he thought might offer some hope.

I felt apologetic, but I didn’t think my history grade would rise that much.

The truth I knew and the truth shouted by the teachers holding textbooks took on different forms.

That discrepancy hit me too strongly.

The one who built the barriers and the heroes who drove away the monsters shared a truth that couldn’t be distorted, so I could answer easily.

But when it came to speculations about events or the birth of monsters, those were different truths to me, so I couldn’t help but feel the difference.

If I recognized that and wrote about it, it would surely be good, but I was just too anxious to make sure I wasn’t writing anything dangerous.

It seemed that grades now meant nothing to me, yet I didn’t want to be known as someone who isn’t making an effort, so I still studied.

It was as if I was subconsciously clinging to that as a way to prove myself.

Just as my thoughts were deepening, something suddenly crossed my mind.

I had been dragged away on Wednesday.

I wasted Thursday and Friday absent.

I broke into a cold sweat, fearing that my grades would suffer due to attendance issues before anything regarding my grades.

At the same time, I was worried about how people who had seen me being dragged away would treat me if they knew the full story.

Should I ask Yoon Hamin? How am I being perceived at the Academy?

Hearing about the miserable situation might make me depressed, but still, the situation I would eventually have to confront wouldn’t change, so I steeled myself.

After taking quite a long time to resolve myself, I waited for Yoon Hamin to finish washing up.

And then we could chat about various things, share discussions about studying, and wait for the night to arrive.

As night deepened, lying on my bed, I decided it was time to speak.

“Hamin, can I ask you something?”

“What is it…?”

Yoon Hamin seemed a bit cautious.

It seemed she thought I might ask something strange, but I couldn’t understand why she was reacting that way.

“At the Academy, are there any rumors about me floating around?”

“…Uh, no, I don’t think so?”

“I’m going to the Academy tomorrow, so don’t lie to me.”

I gave her another chance as she seemed to fumble for an answer, and she let out a small grunt.

“There were a lot of people who saw it… There are some saying that it’s your fault the barriers fell, but since you came back alive and didn’t get executed, won’t that rumor fade away?”

I felt uncertain about her words.

The rumors might disappear, but a stigma that had been branded once was hard to erase.

Even if words didn’t circulate, it would be difficult to remove the colored glasses from people’s eyes.

I exhaled deeply.

That’s how it is, I thought, while also accepting that since I was someone who couldn’t study, I would just receive more intense scrutiny.

“If there are those kinds of people, I…”

“No.”

Yoon Hamin tried to extend a kindness toward me.

“You don’t need to go that far for me.”

But I didn’t want that kind of consideration.

Because, if a monster were to truly invade again, and if it turned out that researchers were right about the monster using my body as totem or easily breaking through the barriers, then Yoon Hamin, who surrounded me, could also get caught up in that.

That’s why I could only say this to Yoon Hamin.

“If something happens to me, stay away and don’t get involved.”

“Why…?”

“It’s dangerous.”

Yoon Hamin’s expression turned emotional at my words.

To change the atmosphere, I asked him.

“By the way, what was that earlier when I was washing you? You seemed to be touching my chest?”

“Uh, well, um, what?”

Yoon Hamin coughed repeatedly like someone who had been taken by surprise and soon spoke in a flustered voice.

Ch. 76 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 76

Sharp gazes and murmuring voices.

They were all directed at me.

While the corridor of this academy became a glorious place, like a red carpet for some, for me it was a far and treacherous thorny path.

I wore gloves that looked like hands to avoid standing out, and I even put on pantyhose designed for prosthetic legs that I usually avoided due to the hassle.

However, no matter how much I tried to hide the existence of my prosthetic arm and leg, I couldn’t block the gazes directed at me.

Even worse, being with Yoon Hamin in such a situation was uncomfortable for me.

I resented Yoon Hamin for insisting on going to school together when I had requested to go separately. I couldn’t understand why we had to attend school together in this situation.

The gazes on me felt mixed with suspicion and doubt. Even Yoon Hamin seemed to be receiving some questioning looks.

No matter what, I didn’t want to bring harm upon Yoon Hamin, yet I couldn’t fathom why he wouldn’t listen to me and insisted on digging his own grave.

I had clearly warned him.

There was nothing I could do this time, but I hoped that if something really happened to me next time, he wouldn’t get caught up with me unnecessarily.

At least the heroes only murmured from a distance, shooting sharp glances without directly causing harm.

It was possible because I came here in the status of a student.

If, as the rumors suggested, I really was allied with the monsters and had come here in hostility, students would have swarmed and beaten me to d*ath by now.

I was also anxious. My heart raced like that of someone about to enter a fight, and I felt a rush of adrenaline that made the tip of my nose tingle.

To be precise, it wasn’t about fighting someone, but rather preparing to feel less pain if I were to be hit.

Despite it all, I managed to enter the classroom without anyone bothering me.

The air turned chilly in an instant, and I could feel the stares weighing down on me, making it hard to breathe. Still, I tried to console myself, reminding myself I’d been at the bottom before.

Yoon Hamin, perhaps aware of my feelings or not, smiled brightly as he greeted other classmates, waving his hand, and finally turned to Orca.

“Hello, Orca.”

Orca, who had been sitting in a chair, greeted us as she looked up at Yoon Hamin and me.

“Hello, Yoon Hamin, Kanna. It’s been a while since you attended school together.”

“Ah, we met on the way here…”

I replied, a bit flustered, almost as an excuse. Orca nodded as if it didn’t matter.

I felt a tinge of discomfort at her slightly colder demeanor.

Surely, some kind of gossip had circulated in my absence.

As the daughter of the Lamiris family, she must have heard various stories being exchanged behind her back.

I worried that she might be angry over the fact that the reason for the barrier’s collapse was blamed not on the Lamiris family, but on me.

People might have pointed fingers in accusation, feeling that the family had committed a wrong, even though it wasn’t their fault, and that realization might have sparked indignation.

“…Ah, class is about to start, so I’ll go to my seat. I’ll be going now.”

“Uh, okay, yes.”

I retreated to my seat as if escaping the awkward atmosphere. Yoon Hamin sounded flustered but soon placed his bag at his seat.

I also sat back down, making an effort to avoid turning my head too much.

It didn’t matter how others saw me. Their judgment of me didn’t matter either.

I had already set it aside, and as I tried to get used to this situation, it didn’t bother me as much anymore.

…Though not completely unaffected, I felt I could endure.

I didn’t feel my lifespan was particularly long. Being in a body that could d*e at any moment, I merely sought what I could do and what I had to do in that time.

I checked the schedule for the first class and had taken out my textbook. Just as I steadied my breath, the front door of the classroom creaked open.

Most of the students had gathered, so if time allowed, there was only one person who would enter through the front door.

“Alright, I’ll call the attendance, so everyone please take your seats~”

Lucia stepped in with the attendance sheet and placed it on the podium. But after a brief glance in my direction, her eyes widened.

Then she looked around for available seats and beckoned me over.

“Kanna? Could you come out for a moment? Everyone please be quiet and study for the first class!”

Leaving behind students who answered with “Yes,” I stood up from my chair and walked towards the waiting teacher at the front door.

“…Yes, teacher.”

“Kanna, um, you were taken by the association, but did they say it was okay for you to act like this without any word?”

“Ah, is there a problem with that?”

I asked a bit nervously, and the teacher seemed to have genuinely asked out of curiosity, as she denied any issues with my question.

“No, unless it’s an issue, there shouldn’t be a problem. Besides, if it was treated that way, there probably wouldn’t be any major incidents.”

I wasn’t sure if there really weren’t any major incidents. So I tilted my head questioningly.

Was the teacher’s concern focused elsewhere? She let out a small sigh.

“I don’t know how the perception is due to the previous incident, so I’m not sure if you’d be alright.”

Would the perception be good or bad? If deciding to come to the academy was based on that, I would have already submitted my resignation letter.

No matter how cornered I felt, I had no intention of backing down.

“Teacher, I’m fine. Besides, nothing is happening.”

“Really? In that case…”

There would be no one around to touch my arms and legs. No one knew if I had soft skin or hard metal.

Except for Yoon Hamin, who had seen my body directly.

So, there would be no one to notice if anything happened to me.

If a report were made to the teachers above, things might change, but I didn’t think that information would spread to the students.

Thus, I insisted again that I was unaffected. The teacher eventually nodded.

“Alright then. The bell will ring soon, so let’s head back in.”

“Yes.”

The teacher headed towards the faculty room, and I entered the classroom.

Four classes in the morning, followed by a silent lunch. It wasn’t until later that the day came to an end after a few classes in the afternoon.

The fortunate thing was that there was no exam this week, but the unfortunate aspect was that things between Orca and me had become somewhat awkward.

It was a bit challenging, but to be honest, it was unavoidable. The people of the Lamiris family were taking the heat because of me, and with the truth emerging, she would have no choice but to look my way.

Of course, it wasn’t like I did it on purpose and hadn’t caused her any mischief, but still, the atmosphere was awkward.

“……”

I blankly looked around.

No matter how the buildings lined up, they couldn’t hide that giant structure of the barrier.

It was an inorganic building, yet it was the only sanctuary for the people of this world.

At the same time, it was a fortress built to exclude the monsters and ensure their safety.

With my eyes fixed on it, Yoon Hamin, who was walking back with me, quietly spoke up.

“Why? Do you think something is coming?”

“…Not really, I was just looking.”

“Like a totem from before, maybe?”

“I don’t know. It wouldn’t make sense to look for something meaningless…”

Honestly, I didn’t want to say that it was meaningless. If there was no meaning in what I was doing, where else could I find meaning?

But considering what the monsters had shown right in front of my eyes was terrifying, and it felt as vague as erasing sand in the desert.

The warm spring breeze of mid-April blew gently, and I felt that the rain might bring some coolness.

Yoon Hamin, who was quietly watching from the side, murmured softly.

“Then shouldn’t we just live as if nothing is related?”

His voice, suggesting to live quietly without touching the totems and pretending to have no connection with the monsters, sounded appealing.

But I couldn’t help but tilt my head, feeling it was just closing my eyes to reality.

“What if a monster suddenly shows up with a monster? What if it spots me?”

I opened my mouth to express a future that had yet to arrive. Perhaps a future that was inevitable.

If monsters were already aware of my existence and were watching me closely, I questioned whether I could escape from that.

If they smiled at me while watching me, what kind of expression would people have when they looked at me now?

With a week’s worth of preparation time—shorter or longer, yet it was a timeframe difficult to pinpoint—I was afraid of the monsters’ psychology. When would the barrier collapse again? Getting through a day was too burdensome for me, and I couldn’t help but sigh.

“If you stay somewhere unknown to the monsters, a hard place to find, then they won’t spot you. In that case, I’ll defeat the monsters in the meantime.”

And to dismiss that sigh, Yoon Hamin repeated his offer to help again and again.

Ch. 77 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 77

Sel was a hero with blue hair and blue eyes. People who did not know her well sometimes thought that she might use ice when they saw Sel the hero.

However, her ability was not ice or water, but fire.

As she was somewhat famous, she became a prime example that appearance and ability were not necessarily related.

Just because someone had a red appearance didn’t mean they were a fire user, and just because someone had a blue appearance didn’t mean they were a water or ice user—she had made this clear several times.

Of course, between the same Awakened Ones and heroes, there was no need to be excessively cautious, but the Academy’s policy was to recommend at least once to understand the opponent’s combat style and what abilities they used before engaging in battle.

If one did not reveal themselves and did not know the opponent, there would be no team that would not synchronize worse than that.

In a situation where lives needed to be saved immediately, it was clear that if heroes showed disorganized behavior, it would erode public trust and no longer instill faith in heroes, which was their stance.

If despair were to come that they could not live within the Barrier, then that might truly be the day of humanity’s destruction.

“…Ah, it’s too frequent. Too frequent…”

Sel mumbled while looking at news articles on her tablet, as if complaining.

Just like doctors and firefighters, heroes were not supposed to say they were free. Even if it meant being called a tax thief and putting up with it, their dream was to remain active and become unemployed when complete peace arrived.

That was humanity's peace and future.

People also did not say to eliminate heroes since the Barrier had not fallen.

No matter how much it seemed they had nothing to do, only a small ignorant minority spoke such words, while the majority were satisfied just with their existence.

It would have been good to live that way, but the world did not let life be that easy and repeatedly broke down the Barrier.

For several decades, whether the monsters had lost interest or had met their end, they had been quiet, but suddenly attacking three times in a row left both citizens and heroes in a state of confusion.

As a hero, Sel went out to fight each time and let out a sigh.

As she whined in her position as a member of Flica, her boss, Reg, clicked his tongue in disapproval.

"Hey, hey. Don't go saying that somewhere else."

"…But boss, don't you think it's too frequent as well? I even knew someone well enough to attend the funeral of a hero who died this time."

"……."

What could he say? He thought to himself that if you were a hero, you would have to experience such things sooner or later, but he could not bring himself to say that out loud.

Having lived for fifty years, he had hardly encountered monsters, so he could only feel that this was just bad luck.

Remembering the funeral, he shut his eyes tightly.

Because the shape of the corpse had disappeared, they could not perform a proper burial or cremation, and in the end, all they could do was gather the remains that resembled flesh and carefully bury them in the ground.

Recalling the horrific tragedy, Reg let out a sigh and looked around at the other employees. They appeared to share the same thought, glancing at him nervously.

Confirming their expressions, Reg sighed deeply.

“What can I say? Stop bringing up the deceased and just get to work. Ah, Sel, let’s talk for a moment.”

“…Yes.”

Sel slightly regretted speaking up, thinking this would earn her a scolding. Nevertheless, she had no choice but to follow her superior, so she stood up from her chair and slipped into Reg’s office.

“Sit here.”

Reg checked the closing door and pulled a chair opposite his desk, then plopped into his own seat. He began clicking away at his computer.

While Sel sat down, the sight of Reg silently working without saying anything made her anxious.

“…Um, may I ask why you called me…”

She hesitantly opened her mouth, wondering if he was upset about the hero who had died in the recent attack. Reg, keeping his attention on the monitor, spoke as if he was not angry.

“Well, since it’s something that has already been shared among a small agency, I’ll mention it… What if the reason the Barrier broke is related to a person?”

“What do you mean by that? Are you suddenly giving me a human rights quiz?”

Sel couldn’t help but laugh in disbelief.

However, seeing that Reg’s expression didn’t change, she nervously rubbed the back of her neck and continued.

“Well… if it’s related to a person, we would first determine that person’s intentions, right? If they collaborated with the monsters, wouldn’t that lead to execution according to regulations?”

“Wouldn’t that execution also entail human rights issues?”

“So when there’s a real emergency, we forcibly adjust that person’s rights.”

“Right.”

Reg nodded in agreement, confirming that Sel’s point was valid.

However, human rights are originally the rights of individuals. They could not be retrieved by someone or given to someone else. They were just a pretext granted by society and the state for the greater good.

Though it was called regulation, such regulations were essentially nonsense.

Even so, people followed it, and the reason they did not question its existence was that they believed it would bring safety.

If there were entities causing dust to rise in the water, people would first eliminate them to keep the water clear.

Reg posed a question.

“Adjusting human rights is said to be for the greater good. But what if that person had no intention to help the monsters? Could they still be executed? Can we still say we adjust their human rights then?”

At that question, Sel narrowed her brows for a moment.

How could someone who had no intention of helping monsters assist them in breaking the Barrier? She tilted her head, perplexed.

“Wait, isn’t something off here?”

“What’s that?”

“Isn’t the very fact that the Barrier broke evidence of siding with the monsters?”

“What if it’s not about breaking the Barrier but rather providing assistance to enable it to be broken?”

“Then that’s the problem, right?”

“…Let’s see.”

Reg brought his finger to the monitor and drew a line while speaking.

“There’s something called a Totem within this Barrier, and the Totem assists the monsters in breaking the Barrier. It’s hypothetical, but what if this is true?”

“So, are you saying that someone inside the Barrier unconsciously formed a Totem?”

“That could be the case, or it might not. It’s all just a hypothesis. Nothing is certain.”

Reg shrugged.

“Actually, there is something certain: we know which person the monsters have targeted. Whether they are an accomplice or an innocent bystander is unknown, but it’s certain that because of that person, the Barrier has broken three times. It’s been reported that they were involved three times.”

He scrolled down the screen, looking at the evidence one by one. Then he adjusted the display so Sel could see it as well.

Sel leaned forward to better view the screen, surprised by what she saw.

The details were clearly written, capturing her attention despite being small.

+

First contact with a monster estimated to be around the time of the first Barrier collapse. Missing for about 5 days.

– According to their own statement, they seemed to have come because they were angry that the ‘Totem’ was erased. Additionally, they were kidnapped after drawing attention by mentioning the vulnerability of a new type of monster.

Second confirmed contact with a monster. After the second Barrier collapse, they were at the Lamiris family home, surviving alone during the transfer.

– The servants accompanying them died in the accident, but they survived alone. The abrupt visit to that area is also highly suspicious. Records from the Lamiris family were included.

Third contact with a monster. Directly identified by the monster within the Academy, and voluntarily reported afterward.

– They claimed they were not on the side of the monsters, but due to the previous two contacts, their credibility was judged to be extremely low. Even if they were telling the truth, the danger of being a potential threat to humanity existed.

+

Sel covered her mouth as she quietly read the account, then shifted her gaze to Reg, asking in a strained voice.

“…This…”

“Oh right. You mentioned you were at the scene.”

Sel had been so focused on the d*ath of her colleague that she briefly forgot this fact. However, upon recalling it now, she quickly realized who it was.

“Kanna, Kanna Aurora. She’s a first-year student, just a child at such a young age.”

The promising girl with ivory hair that Yoon Hamin had been protective of, the one Sel had been keeping an eye on.

Reg sighed, not knowing this fact, and shifted the topic.

“Speaking of which, why wasn’t the one you praised so highly during the practical training there?”

“…Maybe she followed someone she likes?”

“Is that so…? That can happen?”

As Reg spoke, he turned back to the monitor.

Ch. 78 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 78

Wednesday was originally exam day.

However, given the current situation, they were more focused on raising the abilities of all Academy students to act as heroes rather than checking students' academic statuses and administering exams.

There were times when practical classes were conducted alongside written ones.

On the day that was supposed to be the exam, it seemed they intended for everyone to go to their chosen agency to learn as both students and heroes, preparing to be deployed into the field as soon as they were chosen as heroes.

Everyone was nervous.

Everyone remembered the three weeks when monsters had invaded.

Now it felt fearsome to think that they could appear at any time.

However, the monsters were creating tension within the barriers without showing themselves, as if playing hard to get.

The heroes who had spare time wandered near the seemingly empty barriers, checking for safety, and tried to locate something called a totem.

That was the situation now, at the start of May.

Did they think I lacked trust in my words? Or did they just make such choices because they felt there was no other option, even if they couldn’t trust?

I didn’t know which it was, but in any case, I felt reassured to see the heroes standing firm to search for the totem and monitor the barrier’s collapse, without even needing to ask for my help.

Now, the coolness was only present in the evenings.

The sunlight in May was warm, but it felt hot enough to make you sweat if you stood around for too long.

And I received the remarkable record of coming in last place on the last exam as well.

It was nothing new. It couldn’t be helped.

Since I couldn’t achieve a proper score in practicals, coming in last was unavoidable.

I felt that if I performed properly, I could somehow manage, but I just couldn’t.

It felt wrong to achieve results with a prosthetic arm that had such incredible powers. It wasn’t like that.

I simply didn’t want to put myself or those around me in danger by failing to control it or manage it properly.

Moreover, I didn’t want my classmates to know that my arms and legs were not ordinary.

I had reached a state of enlightenment.

And my nerves were more directed towards the monsters than studying, making that feeling even more pronounced.

What was the use of an exam when I didn’t know when I would d*e?

While worrying about such things and letting my shoulders droop, Yoon Hamin glanced at me from the side.

We had split into teams of two at the agency to scout the area, and the purpose of the reconnaissance was to find objects related to the monsters.

Good or bad, the moment I stepped forward, I was feeding information into this place.

With that, an unprecedented tension flowed within the barrier.

The monsters arrived faster than the original story, and we defended against them faster than the original story as well.

They say a single flutter of a butterfly’s wings can create a storm on the other side; was that the feeling?

“…What are you looking at?”

I tilted my head and looked towards Yoon Hamin.

Then Yoon Hamin seemed flustered, but after organizing his thoughts, he spoke up.

“No, it’s just… I was wondering if you were okay.”

“What do you mean?”

“You didn’t use your ability on the last exam on purpose, right?”

At those words, I blankly stared and then cast my gaze back at Yoon Hamin.

There was no need to ask how he knew. Since I spent so much time with Yoon Hamin, he understood my situation better than anyone.

There was no way to hide it, and I sighed at the question and nodded.

“Yeah, that’s right.”

“Why did you do that?”

“Well, if I made a mistake, it would put a lot of people in trouble.”

As I spoke, I slightly raised my hand.

The hand that entered my line of sight resembled a human hand, but I couldn’t forget the mineral-like presence hidden beneath the skin.

Mechanical arm, mechanical leg. There was no need to disclose secrets that teachers and students were unaware of, and I didn’t want to experience something like being electrocuted alone because of it.

“…Is it like the principle of me washing it for you?”

“Maybe…? I guess I should practice controlling it later.”

I said that and pulled my hand away again.

When would the monsters come, when would the barriers collapse, when would I be dragged away? I feared and worried countless times, and felt myself growing more fatigued.

But I had never thought that I wanted to be easily dragged away.

I just hoped for the situation to improve. But could it actually improve?

That was another problem altogether.

Yoon Hamin hummed thoughtfully and then gingerly grasped my arm with his fingertips.

He leaned toward me, halting because he was gripping the sleeve of my blazer.

Surprised, I turned back to him, and Yoon Hamin was slightly bowing his head.

His other hand was tightly clenched against his side and trembling.

“Since we’ve come out a little far anyway, should we do it here?”

“Huh?”

“Other teams could find the totem anyway.”

I hadn’t expected Yoon Hamin to say something like that, and my eyes widened.

Lately, I had been seeing unexpected sides of Yoon Hamin, so I couldn’t help but be surprised.

“What if we had been on the other side?”

I tried to persuade Yoon Hamin and walked forward again.

This time, he was persuaded by my voice and followed me.

He released my sleeve and walked along again.

Yoon Hamin murmured and then cautiously opened his mouth.

“I don’t know how it ended up like this.”

His voice sounded somewhat resigned.

It was as if he was declaring that he could no longer understand.

“…Honestly, I’m scared. I was so busy thinking I’d protect myself while protecting someone else, but now it’s not easy to do that.”

He murmured while looking up at the barrier.

It seemed he was worried that this barrier could collapse at any time.

“Beyond here, there’s unrefined magical power that we can’t easily accept. I think it’s impressive how you managed to endure in such a place.”

With that, he threw me a compliment that sounded considerable.

It was such a sudden compliment that I didn’t know how to respond, and I made a mysterious expression.

An ambiguous expression that neither smiled nor frowned.

A stupid expression where the muscles in my face had given up moving.

“Worrying about the walls collapsing at any time makes me anxious, and if they do collapse, I’ll be afraid the monsters will come for you, or that they’ll say something related to you in front of others. Such actions would amuse the monsters, but to think that would happen to you…”

Yoon Hamin spoke like that but then frowned and swallowed his words.

He seemed unable to say that I would d*e without a guarantee of the future.

I felt that way too. Standing beside him, I felt like I was on borrowed time, living like a dying person.

“If they attacked saying it was related to you, and because of that, hundreds or thousands of people died, I wouldn’t be able to bear it. It feels like they’re taking away your place one by one.”

Hearing those words, I felt deeply that my position was increasingly narrowing.

Ah, I see. It’s almost like there’s no place left for me to stand.

Thinking that way made me feel strangely at ease.

Of course, I didn’t want to d*e. I didn’t want to give up.

But seeing the surrounding scenery tightening around my neck, I couldn’t help but think that I needed to do as much as I could before it was too late.

So all I had left was the thought of trying to hurry up a bit.

“Really?”

I responded to Yoon Hamin’s voice.

Then I noticed the expression on his face as he waited for me to continue speaking.

So I continued my words in line with that expression.

“I feel the same way.”

Yoon Hamin’s eyes shook violently.

It seemed that he couldn’t control the surge of emotions.

Perhaps it was not the answer he hoped for.

But it couldn’t be helped.

“Will I be here next year? No, will I make it through the summer? Will I be here next month? What about next week?”

I speculated about the time given to my future and started to narrow it down bit by bit.

Yoon Hamin seemed to want to say something about the ever-decreasing units.

“There’s no guarantee for tomorrow. And that goes for everyone else too. Just live with that mindset.”

I was telling Yoon Hamin to be strong in his mindset.

He is the cornerstone of this world.

Only Yoon Hamin is the true hero of this world.

While others worked as civil servants in the guise of heroes,

only he stood as a real hero.

The hero who would save the world and humanity.

Even though in the future I knew, he rose to that status, he couldn’t achieve it.

Therefore, I was betting on an uncertain future.

So this time, I wished that he would accomplish and protect what he wanted in this world, as he desired.

For that, he needed to become the strongest.

“I…”

I was someone who had died once.

And I was someone who was on the verge of dying again.

Even if the fate newly given to me was like this, I didn’t think of it as a tragedy.

“I…”

If you could draw an ending I haven’t seen,

if you could give a happy smile that I haven’t seen.

I truly wanted to see that.

But if I said such things, it felt like I might bind him to me, so I could only swallow my words.

After painfully swallowing my words, I shrugged to brush off the conversation and muttered something casually.

“I just hope you’re happy. If you worry too much about me, it’ll only be hard for you going forward.”

Well, it’s not an empty word.

Ch. 79 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 79

Although the appearance of unhappiness is said to take on different forms, happiness is said to resemble everyone.

Why is that, I wondered, and upon reflection, I found myself understanding.

Happiness meant having everything, and in that place, there was neither money nor peace of mind nor anything else lacking; it was abundant.

And as people gradually lost one thing after another from that place, they tumbled into unhappiness.

What was lacking, and how did that lead to unhappiness?

It must be that such unhappiness was created because there was nothing that person deemed important in life.

If I say that, it was a continuous state of happiness for me.

I could say I was originally happy.

But for someone like me, the notion of loss was looming right ahead.

I even wore a half-resigned expression as if facing that impending loss.

Kanna.

She spoke to me with a slightly cloudy smile.

“I just wish you would be happy,” she said.

After that, it seemed she tried to mumble with a playful voice, but I was worried about her heart, which was concerned about whether she would be able to live tomorrow.

Happiness? What must be done to attain happiness?

I was on the verge of something lacking in a life I had thought was already happy.

Kanna was saying she would d*e next to me, but could I be happy while watching her being dragged away to d*e without being able to protect her?

No, did I even have the right to be happy while leaving her like that?

“I should be happy.”

I didn’t think that one needed a specific qualification for happiness.

As long as one felt satisfaction in that place, happiness was possible.

However, if I were to run away from what I could protect, and if it meant sacrificing not just Kanna’s limbs but her life, closing my eyes and ears to the situation, then that would truly be my fault.

Even if it wasn’t my fault that she died, if I were just watching it with my eyes, then I could call that my fault.

I wished. I hoped she could live peacefully.

I hoped she wouldn’t have to worry about living tomorrow.

Did Kanna know that my happiness included her desire for it?

Happiness found after betraying someone couldn’t be called true happiness.

That’s why I had no intention of betraying Kanna.

With that resolve, I kept my mouth shut, and Kanna seemed satisfied with my response, giving me a smile with her eyes.

I wanted to see that smile.

As she had said to me once, I, too, hoped she would smile.

Kanna began walking again as if she was satisfied and lifted her head to gaze at where the barrier was.

Now the world knew of her knowledge.

About the totem, and how monsters could break through the barrier using the totem.

It wasn’t clearly established, but they were sending weak trust in that idea, saying it would be good to be cautious.

That, in itself, was enough to say it had influence.

It meant creating a new set of guidelines for heroes across every city in the nation.

There was no way around it. It was hard to disregard it when monsters were attacking like that.

Nevertheless, was there any reason for Kanna to be made like this? If her body served a purpose like that of a totem, did she think cutting it off was a better option?

While worries and anger swirled around, Kanna’s voice snapped me back to reality.

“…Yoon Hamin.”

“Yeah?”

“Never mind, I’ll tell you later.”

But when I focused and looked at Kanna, she seemed to wrap up the conversation lightly as if nothing was amiss.

I was unnecessarily curious, but Kanna seemed to be pondering seriously whether to say something or not, so I felt it wasn't right to press her.

Since she said she would tell me later, I could simply hear it at the end.

Lost in such thoughts, I suddenly remembered a curiosity that had arisen before.

"Kanna, can I ask you something?"

"…What is it?"

She seemed surprised that I was about to ask right away, and her eyes, glancing back at me, caught my attention.

I took the question that I had harbored for a long time and voiced it.

"You were acting like you knew something. Is it some sort of ability? Or something else… No, more than that, I'm just curious about how much you know. Just how much do you know?"

Information that felt like it came from the future.

The source was unclear. It just felt like she might have seen it somewhere. It seemed to be that way. I couldn't dig any deeper.

Because asking about the source would only yield a vague answer from Kanna, I decided to ask a slightly different question.

How much did she know?

It might sound absurd at first, but ultimately her words seemed to match up somewhere.

Even if she made up strange stories as a joke, I felt I would unreasonably believe that they sounded plausible.

Kanna frowned, as if she was in trouble.

And then she lightly placed her hand on the barrier.

After tilting her head as though feeling nothing, she answered my question.

“Why?”

“…Just curious. If you know something in advance, you could prepare for it, right? Like that new type of monster…”

To be honest, Kanna had no obligation to go that far.

What was obtained after fighting hard with information that no one knew was the loss of limbs.

Having experienced that loss, she might not want to give another handle to its cause.

I could reassure her by saying, I’m different; I won’t act that way. But she might not want to, so I didn’t want to place unnecessary burden on her.

So, I kept silent and waited for her answer, remaining by her side. Kanna, who had been walking at a steady pace, hinted at her willingness to speak.

“Really? But now I don’t know much anymore.”

“Anything is fine. Something that others don’t know… anything like that.”

“But if I say that, you wouldn’t know if it’s true or not.”

“…I don’t think it’s a lie. I can believe it all.”

My heart ached seeing Kanna hesitate to speak because she couldn’t prove her words.

Of course, it was natural for the world not to believe unless there was evidence.

Even so, I thought it wouldn’t be bad to have at least someone believe without evidence or a cost.

Yet Kanna remained steadfast.

As if stating that she already knew, if she couldn’t prove it, she wouldn’t bother voicing it.

“Then can I say something you might know?”

“If so, you might end up knowing everything.”

Then, what significance would that hold?

“How about something you could check quickly?”

“Nothing like that.”

Kanna was firm.

I couldn’t help but wonder what kind of knowledge among what she knew was untouchable and unfindable.

As my curiosity grew like a balloon being filled with air, I felt like that balloon burst.

The words that came out of her mouth gifted me that sensation.

“Yoon Hamin, a child loved by the stars. It said here that it’s light, but that’s only one aspect of the original ability… is it not?”

Goosebumps ran down my spine.

Was it that chilling for information that I hadn’t shared with anyone to come out of someone else’s mouth?

“W-How…”

I lost the ability to speak. It was as if a brake had been thrown at my throat.

When my throat tightened and I couldn’t say anything, Kanna stopped walking and looked at me.

It felt as though someone was probing into my hidden places.

Of course, she had only mentioned abilities, so I shouldn’t feel that much, but I was confident that no one would know about my ability since I had kept it extremely secret.

Not my classmates, not the teachers, not even the heroes I fought alongside knew about my ability, yet only she was aware of its true nature.

That made me feel even more withdrawn, thinking that she might know more.

Although I had lived openly, knowing that she knew so much felt uncomfortable in a way.

This sensation was something that arose inevitably and was different from my feelings toward Kanna.

Shaking my body slightly, I steadied my mind and asked.

“How did you know…?”

Kanna paused for a moment at my question and then quietly replied.

“I saw it.”

“Huh?”

“I know because I saw it.”

What had she seen, and where? Just as I was about to ask again, I suddenly realized and gasped.

The small gasp made me recognize something.

Was everything—the totem, the monster’s weakness, my ability—originating from her?

“I see.”

I nodded without saying anything.

The piercing gaze that had been scanning through me moments ago no longer felt present.

Kanna fell silent. She wore an expression as if wondering whether she had revealed something she shouldn’t have.

Not wanting her to remain silent while swallowing information only she knew, I treated her casually.

“Kanna, shall we head back? I think we’ve had enough for today.”

“Really?”

“What should we have for dinner…”

As we were returning, I took a quick glance at Kanna from the side.

I was curious about what kind of world was being drawn in her eyes as she seemed to be deep in thought.

I thought about whether she might fear seeing a different world alone and wanted to stay by her side.

Ch. 80 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 80

It has been about half a month since I became like this. I couldn’t rely on Yoon Hamin every time I washed up, so I thought it was time to seriously consider my situation.

Since the prosthetic arm is waterproof, getting it wet was not an issue. However, it was problematic when my uncontrolled ability amplified, sparking unexpectedly.

The electric waves that I would emit in fits after absorbing the totems scattered by the monster.

Usually, it was just a prickling sensation, but when I was wet while washing, the risk level changed entirely.

Though it didn’t happen often, I didn’t want to d*e just because of a rare occurrence, so I had entrusted Yoon Hamin with my washing several times.

But even that had its limits.

“…Hamin, can I go outside for a bit?”

“Why? We’re about to eat.”

“I just want to practice controlling my abilities a little.”

“Uh, suddenly?”

“I can’t ask you to wash me every day.”

After my words, Yoon Hamin fell silent for a moment before nodding.

It seemed he was a bit worried about that.

I couldn’t help but think that practicing ability control was necessary.

“Well, can I watch too?”

“Weren’t you preparing food?”

“I should have someone watching in case something happens.”

“That’s true.”

Having one more observer wouldn’t change much.

With that thought, I walked out to the front yard of Yoon Hamin’s house. It wasn’t particularly spacious, but just having it made me feel grateful.

I couldn’t practice on a road where others could see.

I was unsure about how to start practicing ability control while Yoon Hamin was watching… even though I knew I had to.

Even if I had one ability, the way to use it changed based on the situation. If there was distance, I would launch an attack; if I had to stick close for continuous attacks or needed to unleash a burst for a single strike, I would release it.

If I had to pick one, the electric waves that sprang from me like a fit whenever I breathed were closest to a release. Of course, it was so weak that it barely felt like an attack, but in a drenched state, amplifying my ability with the prosthetic arm was enough to cause electrocution.

What should I do to prevent that from happening?

While I was seriously contemplating, I took a deep breath and brought my hands together.

Refined magical power, I was not a being that drew strength from the magical power flowing within this barrier. I was someone who used the unrefined magical power that the monster regarded as oxygen for my own strength.

Yoon Hamin quietly watched me and then asked with a hint of anxiety.

“What are you doing? By the way, controlling it is to prevent the ability that bursts forth unexpectedly, right? Have you ever succeeded?”

“…It’s not that, just let me think in peace.”

“Sorry.”

Yoon Hamin immediately closed his mouth.

In silence, I gently closed my eyes and seriously pondered.

How could I stop the magical power within me from bursting out as if desperately wanting to escape?

“Ah.”

Then it hit me.

If the problem was the excessive magical power that I had absorbed from the monster’s totems, wouldn’t it be enough to just release that power?

I had thought until now that since I couldn’t control my ability, I shouldn’t use it, but if I just closed my eyes, unleashed everything, and let it all out at once, maybe I wouldn’t have an uncontrollable power.

If that happened, I wouldn’t have to deal with discomfort on a daily basis.

Feeling like I had come up with a good idea, I turned to Yoon Hamin.

“What do you think?”

“Uh? What about?”

“If I completely release my magical power, it would go away, and then there would be nothing to control.”

Though I thought it was a good idea, he made a subtle expression, tilting his head as if he didn’t agree.

If I were alone, I would have jumped into action without asking for someone else’s opinion, but for some reason, seeing Yoon Hamin hesitate made me hesitate as well.

Wavering, I scratched my cheek with an awkward expression.

“Maybe that’s a little risky…?”

I felt a bit embarrassed to realize that my good idea might not be good after all. I scratched my head awkwardly before turning away again.

I started to think that this could also carry significant risks.

But considering other options seemed unclear, creating ambiguity.

Yoon Hamin hesitated for a moment in response to my voice before raising his head.

“…So, is Kanna’s ability operated with the same magical power as the monster’s?”

“Probably. Even now?”

“Looks like that doesn’t change even if you lose your limbs.”

He began to murmur something while lightly covering his mouth with his hand, as if lost in thought.

If cutting off my limbs could make the unrefined magical power disappear and return me to my original self, I wouldn’t have had such worries in the first place.

It didn’t happen that way, and that’s precisely why I was facing this issue now.

Since I wasn’t gathering magical power here by eating the totems, if I released it beforehand, I would run out of magical power to control, meaning I wouldn’t have to worry about the risk of electrocution while washing.

“What if I use my abilities and the monster takes advantage of that…?”

He voiced a very reasonable concern.

“If I don’t use it at all, then having excess magical power might make it easier to find me…?”

Watching him repeatedly mull over whether there was a way forward filled me with gratitude.

While I was running out of options and didn’t even know how I might d*e, Yoon Hamin was doing his best to come to some conclusion amidst it all.

If I were alone, I might have already been desperately seeking a way to d*e. No matter how scared I was, I might have ended up sitting on the edge and thinking “whatever.”

Had it not been for Yoon Hamin, my second life might have ended up meaningless, and I might have died before even finding meaning.

I swallowed hard, feeling a wave of melancholy hit me.

“Kanna, then if you release your magical power, I’ll try to purify it as much as I can.”

“…Is that even possible?”

“Why? Didn’t you know about this?”

“No, I didn’t…”

Had Yoon Hamin assumed I knew everything about it? The moment I said I was unaware of some things, he wore an expression as if he had won something.

The Yoon Hamin I knew was merely a written account of him. I wouldn’t know his genuine expressions, what habits he had, and things that weren’t mentioned unless we talked about them.

Thus, I couldn’t help but be surprised that there was a method of using the ability I had never seen before.

Was there a purification aspect to the star’s ability?

“But how?”

In response to my question, Yoon Hamin confidently clenched his fist.

“With an attractive property…”

“Are you out of your mind?”

“Uh?”

Then I rebuked the confidently answering Yoon Hamin.

“If you do that, you would have to swallow the unrefined magical power, right? Doing that puts you at risk.”

“Just because it’s unrefined doesn’t mean it’s all fatal, and if I control the amount…”

“No, no.”

I shook my head.

Regardless of anything else, I could not put Yoon Hamin in danger. Whatever happened, it wouldn’t be strange if everything I had done until now became meaningless.

As I firmly rejected it, Yoon Hamin hesitated this time.

He made a tight fist. Without this or that, we might just be going in circles, and since either side could pose a risk, it felt like we were stuck.

I echoed Yoon Hamin's words.

"If I still have the role of the totem, then… even if it's not technically a totem, if it's performing the role of a signal, it would be better to release it, right? Of course, if it causes something to happen while releasing it, that would also be a problem."

It wasn't easy to come to a clear conclusion about either side, so I kept asking myself questions and repeating the answers to avoid making a mathematical error.

Yoon Hamin took it seriously, believing it was an important issue, and didn't hesitate to answer back earnestly.

"Honestly, either way it's a problem."

Then, he reached a conclusion at the end.

"…If it's a problem whichever way, wouldn't it be better for you not to be chased by the monster?"

"If I release it, it shouldn't cause any issues, right?"

"If you're really worried, I…"

"If that's the case, I won't do it."

It felt like we were back to square one, but perhaps yielding to my stubbornness a bit, Yoon Hamin was sweating and stammering.

"Sorry, then I won't do anything. But what if something goes wrong?"

"…If there's a possibility of you getting hurt no matter what I do, I won't

proceed. If it seems like a problem will arise because of this and you're willing to accept it, then I'll simply choose not to do it."

"Got it."

What Yoon Hamin understood, I didn't know, but he relaxed his tense shoulders that had been rigid just moments ago.

Then, he moved to one side and looked at me intently.

"I won't do anything, but I still want you to release as much magical power as you can. Then you wouldn't have to worry about being chased by the monster, right?"

Hearing his genuinely worried voice made my heart swell a little. I knew he had sincerely come close to me many times before, but still.

"Then, I'll try a little bit for now…"

I created a bit of distance from Yoon Hamin, who was caring for me, and then I directed my two hands towards the ground.

The ground wouldn't conduct electricity, so I felt like I was aiming to sh**t it in this direction as much as possible.

Ch. 81 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 81

I poured out my abilities while feeling extremely nervous.

I could tell that there was more magical power contained within than I had expected. Above all, because of the prosthetic arm, I was able to use my abilities efficiently, which contributed to my relatively low consumption rate.

After firing once, I felt better and continued to the next.

As I felt the magical power gradually depleting from my body, I managed to hold onto that feeling and continued.

I repeated the extraction of magical power to the point where there was no need for control.

If nothing happened, and if nothing occurred, I could live without removing my prosthetic arm.

There was no need to rely on someone every time I washed, and I didn’t have to fear myself.

Not having magical power remaining meant that even the frequency that monsters could detect would be reduced, thus minimizing the chances of them finding me.

However, I could never truly let my guard down.

Even if they weren’t attacking immediately, if a monster were to come leading horrific creatures tomorrow, the day after, or even a week later after

proper preparations, I might have to deal with it without knowing how.

I wanted to believe in Yoon Hamin, who said he would protect me.

Still, I couldn’t just blindly trust him. He was a student, and his influence was weak, so he undoubtedly couldn’t truly protect me.

Since I had to do as I was told, I was certain that there would be restrictions on what I wanted to do.

I could only hope to find a way to protect myself within reasonable limits.

So I fervently wished as I depleted my magical power.

*

The inside of the barrier was still tense.

The three invasions that took place in March and April had inevitably led to people’s heightened anxiety.

However, tension required physical strength, and it needed to be replenished.

Perhaps because of this, as time passed and June arrived, people began to wear subtle expressions while trying to reclaim their daily lives.

Isn’t this the type of incident that happens once in several decades? Those who passed by shrugged off the warming weather and began to seek out a cooler day.

News began to emerge that more people were heading towards the sea, the only place in this country without a barrier.

There were no barriers, only a protective barrier that blocked the flow of magical power in the sea.

While there was a barrier set up to keep a certain distance for fishing, it

seemed that people heading to the beach simply for enjoyment didn’t mind this border, as they all seemed to head that way.

I felt as if I might gradually melt under the increasingly hot sunlight.

With July approaching, wearing even a blazer seemed like it would be unreasonable.

I was slowly getting used to a life that was better than I had expected.

“Kanna.”

It was Wednesday at the Academy. Days were spent alternating between practical training and exams.

I headed towards the teacher at the podium to receive my exam results.

I had always been reluctant since the report cards were handed out on the day of the exam, but now I felt alright about it.

In fact, I was even a bit excited.

“You’re about to escape last place soon.”

Lucia handed me my report card. I accepted it while trying to mask my surging emotions as much as possible.

I could hear the buzzing sound from around me.

The reason my classmates were murmuring so much was that I was on the brink of escaping last place despite having received a score of 0 in one subject.

“…Yes.”

“Please try harder in the future.”

“Yes.”

I had sacrificed one subject in order to boost my overall scores in others.

In doing so, it would not be surprising if the ones who were catching up to me felt a hot fire under their feet.

With an overall higher average in written tests, and thanks to the high scores in the added geography subject, it seemed I could clear it up quickly.

After the Academy's routine ended, everyone buzzed while glancing at me before starting to head their own ways.

Yoon Hamin seemed to have a brief conversation with Orca and then showed her his report card, making a peace sign with his fingers.

In response, Orca stared at the content in a daze, smiled bitterly, and nodded her head.

I watched for a moment before slipping my report card into my bag and zipping it up.

"Kanna, there's a delicious shaved ice shop on the way back. Shall we stop by?"

"…Sure."

It was tough enough being forced to wear a blazer in the already hot weather.

Yoon Hamin's mention of shaved ice was an exquisite proposal for me, so I nodded my head.

As soon as I exited the Academy, I entered a shop that sold waffles and came face to face with the shaved ice he mentioned.

I wasn't particularly fond of red beans, but when I heard there were chocolates instead, I felt better about it.

I wasn't intending to show my feelings, but Yoon Hamin must have caught

on to my subtle change in expression, as he smiled at me while passing me a spoon.

“I was worried you might not like it, but I’m glad.”

“Did it show?”

“Just a little…”

As I asked while touching my face, Yoon Hamin gave a vague answer and trailed off.

I tilted my head, thinking that perhaps I was the type who couldn’t control my expressions.

Well, that aside, ice has a lifespan, so I figured it would be wiser to be moving my spoon rather than worrying about things like that, so I subtly moved my hand.

As I tasted the sweetness and coldness, my body shivered.

Yoon Hamin took a bite and nodded once.

As I savored the collaboration of melting chocolate and ice in my mouth, Yoon Hamin seemed to have something to say and started a conversation.

“By the way, it seems like your relationship with Orca has worsened… what do you think?”

I flinched a bit.

I wanted to be friends again, but knowing that her family faced backlash because of me and I was the one causing trouble made me feel incredibly guilty, leaving me unable to approach her first.

Of course, I thought it might be better to at least have a word with her once, but since she wasn’t coming to me first, it made me feel awkward, like I was the perpetrator approaching her.

Given the circumstances, it seemed like they were trying to assign urgent matters to her family because of this incident, so even if we were to become friends, I didn’t think there would be much time to talk.

“I think it still needs more time…”

“Is time really the solution?”

“Maybe, for now?”

Seeing my expression that indicated answering was difficult, Yoon Hamin smiled bitterly and nodded his head.

He then let out a deep sigh.

He seemed to be looking carefully at something on the device screen before bringing up another topic.

“It seems like people are already going to the beach since it’s hot these days.”

It looked like he got that news to quickly change the subject.

It was news I had seen while eating breakfast that morning, so it was certain he was reiterating it.

“Really? To the beach…”

I pondered for a moment. What would happen if my prosthetic arm touched seawater?

No matter how waterproof it is, ordinary water and seawater are different, so would that be problematic?

Thinking that just going to the beach with artificial limbs attached was ridiculous made it seem less interesting.

Moreover, even if I were in seawater, I wouldn’t be able to avoid the scorching sunlight, and just moving there would seem hot, so I didn’t particularly long for it.

For me, the best way to spend the summer was ultimately turning on the air conditioner indoors, covering myself with a blanket, and lounging around.

“Why? Do you want to go to the beach?”

“No, I wouldn’t want to go even if I wanted to with this body.”

It felt a bit awkward to declare I had no interest outright, so I said it in a small voice.

I waved the hand holding the spoon slightly, and seeing that, Yoon Hamin let out a sigh and kept quiet.

I thought that just saying I disliked it might cause unnecessary bad feelings, so I tried to be vague, but it seemed to have instead worsened the situation, so I felt a bit sorry.

Feeling awkward, I chewed on the shaved ice.

“…And being in a cool place is definitely better than moving around in a hot place.”

As I added needless commentary, Yoon Hamin smiled bitterly and nodded.

“Really? I’m glad. I thought you wanted to go but couldn’t.”

“Oh, no. That’s not it.”

Having this condition put restrictions on everything I did, making it hard to speak comfortably.

I figured that worrying about the restrictions caused by my body wasn’t a good thing.

Yoon Hamin listened to my words, and his shoulders relaxed as if he felt relieved.

He then shifted to another topic.

“By the way, it seems like the time when you released your strength was the best.”

“Yeah. I’m glad you suggested I try it… Ah, maybe I should have saved some for the exam?”

“You should’ve.”

As I chuckled while asking, Yoon Hamin replied with a smile.

Even while saying this, everyone knew it would be uncomfortable to use abilities operated by unrefined magical power in such a place.

Because of that flow, it could make other kids feel uneasy, and it was likely that a warning would be given again, so I was staying cautious.

In the midst of exchanging such trivial jokes, a loud bang resonated.

For a moment, I was joyous about being on the verge of escaping last place despite dropping one subject.

Bang.

“Kanna.”

Yoon Hamin’s face looked pale.

He pushed his chair back and stood up, softly calling my name.

The store owner and customers all jumped in surprise and began preparing to flee.

With a massive tremor that was suggestive of an earthquake or something similar, everyone seemed enchanted and left the building in a rush.

Bang.

As I burst outside, the sight before me was the barrier visible beyond the horizon.

Due to its immense size, it was a barrier that could be seen from anywhere, regardless of the distance, and it was crumbling.

Ch. 82 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 82

A month and a half forced people to ease their tension. No matter how much they hated it, it only led to the question, “How long are we going to stay like this?”

Knowing that the danger of an unseen threat started from there, more people began to act with their freedom, peace, and safety weighed on a scale.

One became two, and two became four.

Of course, there were people who clearly maintained their tension in between, but those who loosened their tension and wandered around were more noticeable.

Fortunately, heroes and agencies did not let their guard down.

The vigilant heroes desperately turned their steps to prevent the collapsing barrier. At the same time, they checked whether a monster was sneaking in among the rampaging beasts.

At this point, the students probably could have really stopped at just the practical training.

Buzzing, the device in Yoon Hamin’s hand vibrated. It was probably a message from earlier suggesting that he should go and gain practical experience.

Should I find a place to run away? I thought, but my device also vibrated.

Could it be that all the students would be involved in this practical training? I looked at the screen.

[Kanna Aurora will come to the Academy.]

It seemed everyone was heading to the Academy first, so I casually asked Yoon Hamin if it was the same this time.

“…Hey, which way are you going?”

“I need to go to where Sel is, the hero. Why? Where are you going?”

“Uh, they said to come to the Academy?”

If it were the same message as Yoon Hamin’s, I would have thought all the students were doing such practical training, but since it seemed not to be the case, this message seemed to be sent solely to me.

“Really?”

Yoon Hamin tilted his head.

Perhaps he thought that since the barrier had collapsed again, he wanted to check what I, someone considered a person of interest, was doing.

If I showed any signs of trying to contact someone, it would lead to execution. Otherwise, would they provide protection? No, I didn’t think so. If my very existence contributed to breaking the peace within this barrier, that would also be grounds for execution.

I felt like I was crawling under the executioner’s blade. I hoped the person holding my lifeline would have a change of heart.

“Well then, I should go this way.”

As I thought it would be best to act according to what was written on the device, I tried to turn my steps subtly.

Yoon Hamin grabbed me.

“Wait a minute.”

Yoon Hamin, holding my arm, hesitated before finally speaking with difficulty.

“Can’t you just stay with me? We could go together and feel the atmosphere…”

“But won’t it raise more suspicion if we don’t go?”

“Then just let me entrust it to Senior Sel.”

“What?”

I furrowed my brow in response, but Yoon Hamin, thinking it was a good idea, immediately started calling on his device.

Who could he be calling? Teacher Lucia? Or Sel? I didn’t think it would be that easy to ask them.

In the first place, trying to gain unilateral authority in this way might instill anxiety in them and make my own position even more precarious.

Whether he knew my feelings or not, Yoon Hamin stated that the call was connected and began talking into the device.

“Senior, can I go with my friend for the practical training? Ah, yes, yes. That’s right. So I was wondering if you could mention it to the Association?”

It would indeed be better to ask a current hero than a teacher. But I wondered if making such a request might be a bother to the other party.

“…If not, that’s fine. Yes? It’s okay?”

What? Really?

Perhaps not expecting it, I found myself more surprised at Yoon Hamin’s bright voice.

But during the call, I wondered how he would check whether it was possible or not.

Was there someone like Asrad present?

Where was Sel affiliated? Flica?

The agency Flica had its president, Reg, who was quite powerful. I knew there was someone strong, but whether he viewed Sel positively or Yoon Hamin positively, I didn’t know he would even grant permission.

I looked at Yoon Hamin halfway in shock.

Finishing the call, Yoon Hamin had a bright expression as he led me.

“It’s a go! Let’s hurry and join!”

“Uh, uh, okay…!”

To have someone quite influential among the heroes watching your back, was this what it was like?

Yoon Hamin headed first to block the monsters coming through the barrier following Sel.

I decided to join with the guidance of another hero, first facing the person who had granted me permission.

Before me sat the owner of the table, the president of the Flica agency, Reg Pelein, who, with his graying hair neatly swept back, was looking at me.

His sharp blue eyes seemed to be trying to pierce through my secret.

He gazed at me thoughtfully, then slightly loosened his tie that was constricting his neck.

“Have a seat.”

“Yes.”

I gently sat down on the sofa in the center of his private office. He then stood up from his desk and took the seat beside me to continue the conversation.

“I trust you will forgive me for not being able to offer you tea.”

“Ah, it’s okay.”

“You must be the Kanna Aurora girl.”

“Yes.”

Reg began as if he already knew about me.

Since he was one of the influential heroes, I assumed he would naturally have this level of information, so I merely nodded calmly.

“Setting aside anything about myself, you know that the reason you could come here is that I’m watching your back.”

“…Yes.”

“Though it was almost forced during the post-report, we have been paying a little attention to Yoon Hamin.”

I tried to endure this heavy atmosphere without managing even a bitter smile.

He was showing interest in Yoon Hamin. The Flica agency wanted him to join. Was he trying to have me owe them a favor in that sense?

As it’s typical for academy stories, Yoon Hamin would face despair before he could even graduate, so I didn’t know which agency he would choose, hence I remained silent.

Ultimately, Yoon Hamin would choose whichever he deemed right, so it was not an area I could interfere with.

As I kept silent, he contemplated briefly, stroking the stubble on his chin with his fingertips before continuing.

“We will place as many surveillance measures as possible, but I wanted to call you here to let you know that if you don’t make an effort on your part, the situation might also become difficult for us.”

I nodded in response. Seemingly satisfied, he smiled and said:

“If you can cooperate and prove that you have no connections, it will benefit us both. I will send you to where Sel and Yoon Hamin are, so just keep in mind what I said.”

“Yes, got it.”

Proving my innocence was the key. In fact, it was important that my relationship with the barriers collapsing was completely nonexistent.

Whether my physical condition was half-monster or I was a spy didn’t matter to them. The essential issue was whether or not I was the source of the barrier’s collapse, and thus I would be put in jeopardy if that was the case.

“Then you may go.”

I vacated my seat and began to walk towards the scene near the barrier under the guidance of another hero.

Soon enough, I encountered Sel, who had blue hair and blue eyes. I also realized that Yoon Hamin had black hair and golden eyes.

As I faced them, I blankly stared before glancing at the hero who had guided me.

A female hero with green hair and red eyes. Since I didn’t recognize her appearance, she might have been a hero passing by.

As our eyes briefly met, she shook her head.

“No.”

What was not allowed?

Was it escaping from this place? Or did she think I wanted to be granted unilateral authority?

Regardless, it was irrelevant to me, so I merely nodded without saying anything.

Upon seeing that, the hero seemed to find it unexpected and glanced at me once more.

I quietly stood in a safe spot and watched them.

Seeing Sel raise her output surrounded by blue flames, and Yoon Hamin producing light with the ability of the stars, drawing lines to defeat the monsters, I was reminded of how impressive they were.

In comparison to other heroes, they held no shortcomings. Without the blazer, one might have failed to recognize that they were first-year students at the academy.

In terms of experience or knowledge, they might have some shortcomings, but their abilities were significant enough that the Flica agency must have coveted them.

They were exactly the kind of talent that agencies sought, ready for real-world deployment.

With perfect skills, practical and theoretical, not to mention the right mindset, who would refuse someone like them?

What awaited them beyond the crumbling barrier were the visions of the monsters.

I briefly took my eyes off Yoon Hamin and glanced around.

As I turned my head, consciously aware of the monsters repeating their ambush tactics, the hero beside me looked at me.

“Are you looking for something?”

“…No. It’s just…”

However, saying that I was looking for a monster would undoubtedly raise suspicions, so I had to dodge the question.

And soon, responding to that, a monster revealed itself among the other beasts.

The heroes, conscious of the monster sneaking in, tried to find the red eyes between the black orbs.

“—The alert has been raised?”

The monster, nonchalantly looking around despite being targeted by their swords and spear tips, felt like a true monster.

Ch. 83 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 83

The area beyond the barrier was untouched by human hands and was filled with undergrowth.

Although there were buildings, they had all fallen into disrepair due to neglect, and the gaps were taken up by weeds and vines.

With no one living there, and nobody passing through, the concept of a path had vanished. There were only places disturbed by animals.

The people who lived on unrefined magical power tried to coexist with the animals.

Of course, if one were to ask what that coexistence looked like, it would be different from the harmony everyone understood.

“…Reika, are you going again today?”

“No, I should take a break for now. I need to restock on monsters.”

The being called Reika was the instigator who had broken through the barrier three times.

Habar, the monster gazing at her from the side, could not understand why Reika was so relentless in her efforts.

Despite having the same black hair, the same black eyes, and the same red irises, they had differing body types and voices, which reflected their contrasting personalities.

Habar scratched his short hair in annoyance and lay down on a tightly woven hammock made of sturdy vines. Showing signs of irritation, he abruptly turned his head away.

Reika then turned her head towards Habar, who had completely lost interest in her.

“Don’t you feel frustrated?”

“Frustrated about what?”

“The people inside all hate us, don’t they? They dislike us.”

“I don’t know; I haven’t gone inside.”

Reika pointed at the wall.

It had been quite some time since she looked at the dividing wall with resentment. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say she had done nothing but watch it since she was born.

Breaking through the barrier required a considerable amount of time and many preparations.

Although she had succeeded in finding what her predecessors had prepared and breaking down the wall, now it seemed uncertain whether another attempt would succeed due to the heightened vigilance.

That was why Reika was making a plea for help.

Even if she could break through the barrier alone, she wouldn’t be able to manage what came afterward, and she didn’t want to d*e for nothing.

Being expelled for being immune to unrefined magical power, she felt wronged living without civilization. Moreover, she harbored resentment towards those who had cast them out. This made her want to k*ll even more.

So, she could not stop.

“Habar. Please help me.”

“…It’s a bother. I don’t envy or get angry about something I’ve never seen…”

As if to denote that differences in personality couldn’t be bridged, Habar turned his back to Reika.

In contrast to Reika, who gathered any remaining documentation, read it, learned about anger, and absorbed it, Habar would simply acknowledge it and move on.

“Why not try charming someone else?”

Habar had turned his back on Reika, but perhaps thinking he couldn’t completely ignore her, he pointed toward the direction of the village. Reika briefly shifted her gaze to that but soon looked back at Habar.

She needed Habar’s ability.

Handling unrefined magical power was something everyone could do. However, individual traits existed in everyone.

Just as Reika could make a monster very small to carry, Habar had a unique ability of his own.

Reika desperately wanted that ability of Habar’s.

“Your ability is really great; it would be awesome if you could help me.”

“It’s a bother…”

“Then, I’ll give you this. Don’t you like this?”

She pitched an interesting offer to him, who found everything bothersome, didn’t want to care, and lived each day just trying to survive.

It was a purple cube that came from her tattered clothing pocket.

“What’s this?”

Habar turned his head slightly at Reika’s words. As he looked at the cube being presented to him, Reika flashed a sly smile.

“A delicious monster.”

“…….”

And the hammock wobbled slightly.

It is a story often recounted, but in truth, barriers are originally buildings that are difficult to break. Even if one is a monster, the very act of breaking down a barrier multiple times poses a challenge.

However, there was something that made it possible: the existence of totems and abilities.

For three times, the complacency of humans had been enough to break through the barrier with totems. But now that humans had learned of the totems, it was no longer a viable option.

If that was the case, what other means exist to break through the barrier without totems? Was it even feasible to break it down without such prior preparations?

When such doubts arose, Habar, the one who seemed least interested in the barrier, was what came to mind.

Habar was that monster.

He was perpetually irritated and regarded surviving as his sole purpose. Unlike others, he didn’t dream of a future or even reflect on the past, being quite lazy. But he still liked to eat, and for the sake of food, he would sometimes overcome his annoyance.

Perhaps that was why, in this transaction involving Reika and the monster, Habar's potential felt especially significant.

Despite being smaller than Reika, when he clenched his fist and struck the wall repeatedly, cracks began to appear in the barrier. As it shook with strong blows, Reika felt a tinge of nervousness.

They needed to k*ll people in a flash, and she worried that this delay might give them too much time.

But perhaps it wasn't necessary for such worries, as Habar's fists soon broke through the wall.

"…Monster."

Drawing out his magical power, Habar broke down the wall without totems and looked back at Reika, extending his hand. Reika snapped her fingers and tossed him a cube.

As the seal of the cube was released and transformed into a giant monster, it turned out to be a chicken monster. Habar recognized it and nodded, jumping on it.

"Mom will like this."

The monster, about to crow, walked away from the broken barrier in a way distinct from Habar's touch.

Reika watched the departing figure and smiled bitterly. She wished he had helped next time as well, but it seemed entirely in character for Habar to just trade once and leave.

Still, Reika thought this was enough.

After all, she had called in other monsters too.

By trading for a monster, she intended to draw out their hatred and make chaos inside the barrier.

If things had gone as they were before, she would have taken more time, but there seemed to be an entity inside who was suspiciously knowledgeable about her and monsters, so she felt rushed.

She sometimes thought if she should have killed them instead. But she still preferred the sight of them howling in despair, wanting to show that it was futile, so she scattered the cube she had hidden in the air.

As the seal was broken, massive monsters forced their way into the narrow pathway of the barrier. With the sound of crashing, the other beings looked toward Reika.

“Can we go in?”

“Is it okay to k*ll…?”

Though there were only two, it was sufficient.

The new beings, adapted to unrefined magical power, dubbed ‘monsters,’ possessed more superior strength than even the best of humans.

Reika nodded at one man and one woman.

“k*ll them all. Everything you see. And when you’re satisfied, come back. Then, I’ll give you more than what Habar took.”

“Okay!”

“Then we can k*ll…”

The two hid behind the giant monster as instructed by Reika, and she slowly walked out, not hiding anywhere to draw the attention of others.

Having broken the barrier and released the monsters, time may have passed, but the people were pointing their swords at Reika. Some jumped in to exclude the monsters, while those who felt a sense of ease raised their weapons at her, who was much like a command center.

“—They have raised their vigilance?”

Seeing their vigilance heightened to such an extent felt bothersome.

After sending off Habar, she worried she would fail immediately if she went in alone. But now, knowing she had allies, she felt more at ease than anxious.

As she drew attention like this, other monsters could ride through the giant one and create chaos elsewhere, so she waited and opened her mouth.

“It’s been a while, everyone, though I don’t know if you remember my face.”

As she stepped forward, someone stood in front of Reika. With dark blue hair and shining dark eyes, he approached confidently.

The man who had joined through the station was Asrad.

“There’s no reason to remember.”

Holding a sword, he inhaled sharply through his mouth and readied his stance.

“Ah, but I remember.”

Reika smiled slyly, recalling Asrad. With that, she extended her hand.

“Like this, right?”

“!”

Asrad’s eyes widened, and at that moment, his body was pushed back. With a thud, the force knocked him off balance as another explosion of air occurred from the left, trying to take his equilibrium away.

Just managing to turn his body without falling, Reika smiled at him.

“Despite having such abilities, you managed to stand before me. Something that’s just trash now after showing it only once.”

Asrad’s gaze wavered.

He had ventured out, risking his life for other heroes, yet facing a monster that saw through and mimicked his ability made cold sweat run down his back.

Reika grinned and took out a purple sphere from her pocket.

“Hey, did it seem like the same ability? I just pushed you.”

The sphere dropped from her hand. The sphere, which fell listlessly to the ground, immediately summoned a monster.

Ch. 84 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 84

The monster that revealed itself with the release of Reika’s power was a new species of monster that had been seen before.

It was not reminiscent of any animal form; instead, it was a bizarre creature with a body and legs but lacking a visible boundary between the head and neck.

With its strange appearance lacking even the most basic functions of a life form for survival, people felt a chill.

Who on earth created that thing and for what purpose? For a moment, questions like these crossed their minds, but when it came to the entity in the hands of the monster, it could only be surmised that it was created to annihilate humans.

Everyone trembled at the loudly resonating vibrations but steadied themselves, thinking they were heroes standing here.

Asrad, caught up in the sudden appearance of the monster, lost balance and flew into the air.

True to a veteran, he did not let go of his weapon, but the shock left him too high up to focus on landing properly.

“Ugh…!”

Holding onto his churning stomach, he searched for a safe place to land.

And not long after, a hero came running to catch him.

“Asrad!”

“…Fales!”

A young man who was friendly with Asrad approached, stepping on the air.

Having sought him out for guidance due to the similarity in their abilities, it was understandable that he couldn’t look away.

Though Fales jumped up, he was unsure of where to grab, and in the end, he caught the hem of Asrad’s neck and landed safely on a nearby rooftop.

“…Is that how you catch your mentor?”

“But there was nowhere else to grab!”

Asrad chuckled at Fales’ brazen reply but then turned his head.

It was not the time for lighthearted jokes, and he resumed his serious expression.

Knowledge was already circulating regarding the once-unknown monster.

The problem, however, was whether the monster also understood this and had reinforced its skin, making it thicker or altering its vulnerability, causing the heroes to struggle as well.

“I suppose we must go again.”

“Should I take you there?”

“No, I can go alone. You should go do what you need to do.”

“Yes, then I’ll go help my agency members.”

With those words, Fales jumped off, stepping lightly through the air.

Asrad looked around, unsure of how to resolve the current situation.

Eventually, he fixed his gaze on a noticeable hero.

No, while he fought like a hero, he was wearing a school uniform.

Though terms like aspiring hero or budding talent could be attached, he was merely a young sprout too young to be formally called a hero.

Yet, seeing him bravely fight like a hero, Asrad felt he could be compared to others.

Yoon Hamin, who caught Asrad’s attention, was wielding a sword while his blue tie fluttered.

It would not have been strange for anyone to think his ability was light, as he was radiating brilliance.

A dazzling flash occurred, but it was not electricity.

The fleeting gleam of his sword momentarily captivated the attention of the nearby heroes.

Whether he knew it or not, Yoon Hamin dealt with the monsters, one by one, under Sel’s lead.

“Yoon Hamin! There’s a monster over there, so don’t get any closer, student!”

“Huh?”

With a flash, one of the monsters collapsed and disintegrated into dust in the air.

At Sel’s voice, Yoon Hamin’s gaze shifted not to the fallen monster but to the location of the entity.

From a distance, the human form was recognizable, and an opposing bizarre presence could be felt.

To Yoon Hamin, that feeling felt familiar. He quickly realized it was the flow of unrefined magical power that he sensed when Kanna exhausted her own magic.

He gritted his teeth.

The culprit responsible for Kanna's limbs being severed.

The thought of its torment following Kanna flashed through his mind, igniting a desire to k*ll it as quickly as possible.

"But…!"

"Listen to me! You're not going to become a hero!"

However, what held him back was society itself.

If one had to d*e fighting, there might be an altruistic thought that one should at least be an adult.

Conversely, pushing students to their limits might lead to their demise, causing one to carry that responsibility.

Though Yoon Hamin couldn't discern exactly how he was being tied down at that moment, he understood that something was indeed holding him back.

"…Ugh."

He entered the academy to become a hero.

He worked hard with this power to save numerous people.

No matter how noble the cause, he also knew that acting recklessly did not make one a hero.

Thus, when Sel’s voice warned that recklessness could lead to failure in becoming a hero regardless of grades, he hesitated.

Yoon Hamin’s frustration became unbearable.

So, he halted his steps, grinding his teeth.

Sel pointed at the monsters rushing in, seemingly trying to calm him.

“We just have to deal with the monsters until we get the command. Look at that.”

The strange monster he had seen before, unlike any animal.

However, unlike before, the number and thickness of paths that had to be severed were all different now.

Yoon Hamin hesitated but eventually resolved to accept the challenge and raised his head.

No matter how difficult it might be to deal with, communication among heroes had already circulated multiple times, so they were already engaging before Yoon Hamin even jumped in.

The issue was the entity beside him.

“Are you ignoring me?”

Feeling offended that it was being ignored while trying to deal with the monster next to it, the entity Reika stretched out her hand.

A hero instinctively swung their weapon forward.

Not to attack, but to defend.

A loud crack echoed as the spear the hero had was shattered.

“Ugh…!”

They lost their weapon, and as a result, there was no choice but to withdraw from the front lines until they could resupply, but at least they could consider themselves fortunate to have survived.

The other heroes were tense and ready to fight, and both Sel and Yoon Hamin faced the scene, needing to make a judgment.

What if they dealt with the monster only to receive such an attack? Sel, with worry in her mind, slightly turned her head.

She could not afford the luxury of contacting through a device, so observing her surroundings and acting prudently took priority.

Although she had come closer, the option to retreat still existed, which she considered.

In that moment, Sel noticed another figure of a sentient being beyond.

“Another entity…?”

Before she could finish that thought, she looked on as a hero fell victim to a surprise attack from the entity.

It was the moment that shattered the faith of those who believed both the entity and the approaching monsters could be dealt with easily.

*

I could only watch from a distance, unable to do anything.

The frustration of this situation, where I was repeatedly told to do nothing, was overwhelming.

I felt as though I had done everything I could, yet it seemed inadequate. My chest felt tight.

Though my prosthetic arms and legs were undoubtedly free, the heavy metal felt like shackles restraining my body.

What was once a single entity had increased to three.

And now, it was the moment I faced the entity that the world was trying to turn away from.

Having already encountered one entity, I had little interest in what lay beyond the barrier and had no clue how to respond.

I opened my eyes to the sensation of unrefined magical power seeping through the crumbled barrier.

The hero who had been standing guard over me began to join the fight, so there was no one blocking me.

Thus, I could advance without anyone’s guidance.

As I traversed the space of fierce battles, I saw over a dozen heroes fiercely grappling with the entity.

Maybe it was because I was getting closer to the fallen barrier, but my body began to feel the flow of magical power trickling within.

The moment I faced the entity, memories of being in the cave surged back, causing my body to tingle.

My limbs, which were no longer there, throbbed painfully.

As my ability sensed the surge, my prosthetic arm began to amplify it.

I gripped that and dashed among the heroes.

Not at the entity that had severed my limbs countless times, but towards another entity that had suddenly appeared.

“…!”

The red eyes followed me.

It seemed to have caught onto my movement as I passed by.

Perhaps it was because the color of my hair stood out so much.

“Uughh!”

The entity that had severed my limbs, one of the heroes fighting it screamed.

In a flash, violet flashes and bright white flashes exchanged.

Turning my back on that, I reached out towards the male entity.

“Eh.”

The hero aiming to attack the male entity abruptly halted.

The entity that was about to receive that attack had caught sight of me and turned its body.

There was simply no way I could be faster than the entity that suddenly changed its target, so I bit my teeth and unleashed my ability.

Crackle—

The heat extending beyond my prosthetic arm burned through the sleeve of my dress shirt and blazer in an instant, reducing them to charred remnants.

And the body of the entity I was aiming for was scorched away as well.

“Graaah—”

The scream was abruptly cut off.

Ch. 85 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 85

I couldn’t properly accept the magical power, which was my problem that prevented me from wielding proper strength.

Before doing anything, not being able to even take the exam properly was my limitation.

But I was completely different now.

Having become a being similar to a monster, I could easily accept unrefined magical power, unlike ordinary magical power. Things that were undoubtedly impossible when I was just a normal human became simple tasks for me now.

Thanks to a prosthetic arm that amplified my magical power, my ability surged significantly without distinguishing between unrefined or refined power.

Kwah-ji-ji-ji-jik.

The lightning radiating from my palm was enough to cut off the screaming voice of the male monster.

Even though I thought I shouldn’t involve others, my mind was warning me that I had to deal with this monster first, so I gathered my strength.

“d*mn you…!”

An uncomfortable voice that scratched the throat followed. At the end, that hand reached through the lightning and grabbed my chin tightly.

The foul smell of burning flesh. And the scorched smell of my clothes pierced my nose.

“d*e!”

As if disturbed, the monster grabbed me and took a step forward. As he stepped ahead, my body was pushed back. My staggering steps tangled, and I fell backward, feeling the impact on my body.

“Guh!”

The monster’s right fist was headed straight for my face.

For a moment, the nearby heroes hesitated and threw themselves to protect me, but the fist was closer.

During the lesson on dealing with giants, we were told to watch the opponent’s fist until the end. But that was a matter for when you could dodge the opponent’s punch, and lying on the ground now made it impossible, so I shut my eyes tightly.

I bit my teeth and braced myself, but the fist never came.

I cracked my eyes open slightly to see something falling on my blazer. The monster’s arm had been severed. The monster rolled on the ground in agony, and the one that had been on top of me was pushed away.

“…Kanna, are you okay?!”

I thought I was facing the same monster I had seen before, but here he was running towards me in no time.

I wiped my shocked heart and nodded.

“Uh, yeah. I’m fine.”

The monster with the severed hand seemed to roll on the ground and then firmly pressed his remaining healthy hand on the ground, spinning in mid-

air. The monster charged at a hero who was slightly away from him, swinging the right hand that had just been severed.

“I think we should deal with that first.”

Other heroes were diligently responding, but Yoon Hamin thought it was still not enough and gripped his sword again.

“Wait, what about that monster?”

He just referred to it as a monster, so the name was simply that. I vaguely knew his name but had never spoken it out loud.

Yoon Hamin glanced back and then chuckled.

“It’s okay. Everyone’s heroes, right?”

He replied that there are people who can do even better than him.

The number of monsters was similar to before, but the number of monsters had increased to three. That fact caused confusion within this barrier.

Yoon Hamin gripped his sword and made a mark. The dots he etched in the air symbolized stars. After several were made, the stars connected to form a constellation, and the lines between them became a severing line.

Compared to the other heroes, that ability was unimpressive, yet it briefly distracted me.

First, I had extinguished the most urgent fire. But the problem was with me.

Having output too high, the right arm of my dress shirt and blazer burned completely. Even the glove that had looked like a human hand.

As my hidden prosthetic arm revealed itself, its dark metallic color came to light. I could feel my gaze sliding over the sight as if a clank sound would be heard.

I didn’t want to show such a thing.

Unconsciously, I turned around, wondering if someone watching me would be flustered.

If I was worried for no reason, I shouldn’t be doing this, but I repeated to myself that I couldn’t do otherwise.

I had to desperately block that just now. So I firmly believed that someone would testify about it around me.

While I was hesitating, the monster approached quickly. It had surely been under simultaneous attacks from nearly twenty heroes moments before, yet it ignored all that and came towards me, which was incredibly bewildering.

That monster.

It was the monster that had been tormenting me.

“–You, I told you to squirm and live, but you seem to not grasp your station?”

A white hand struck my left shoulder.

In that instant, I attacked her right arm with my right hand. A flash of light surged, striking the monster in a straight line, but the monster casually slapped my temple with its left hand.

“Guh!”

“Student!!”

As I rolled on the floor, the heroes who had been rushing to catch another monster changed their targets and swung their swords. Even in such a situation, the monster fought unabashedly, alternating between its right and left hands.

I knew it was ambidextrous, but I never expected it to fight this proficiently, which was incredibly troubling.

Dizzy from the chaos, I barely lifted my head and turned my gaze toward the monster.

No matter how much it was a monster, it was after all still human.

An extraordinary human who merely endured unrefined magical power.

There were no special weaknesses. It just required more strength than when killing a person.

“It seems the monsters are starting to fall, should I head back…”

With a relaxed tone as if contemplating going home, the monster opened its mouth. During that, it casually smashed the heroes’ weapons and attacked, which felt bizarre.

“But you’re still bothersome.”

Its red eyes were fixated on me.

“Seeing you act up when I told you to stay still, I guess it’s a rebelling mentality?”

The heroes found no value in responding to that voice and simply repeated their attacks, but to me, who could hear that voice up close, it sounded chilling.

The number of dying heroes was increasing.

There were also more heroes losing their weapons or seriously injured, retreating from the scene.

However, heroes defending the opposite side of the barrier were supporting and gaining the upper hand.

Yet, the monster’s attacks, still focused on me, showed no signs of hesitation.

I wanted to shout at that monster.

Please d*e.

How can I k*ll that monster?

Can I escape from this hellish life?

All the heroes who were originally facing the monster and those nearby converged.

In an instant, I felt the monster was concealed in the crowd.

But before the monster completely vanished, something purple emanated from its hand.

“Wait…! Everyone run!”

“Bloom—”

I cried out desperately, but the heroes had already rushed in, and from the monster’s hand emerged a massive chunk of magical power.

What it unleashed was neither a totem nor a bound monster.

It was just an explosion of gathered unrefined magical power.

The problem was that for those who had no resistance to unrefined magical power, even that felt fatal.

Knowing the danger, I reached out my hand.

Kwah-aaaah—

In an instant, the flow of magical power around roiled and swayed.

Refined and unrefined magical powers collided countless times, causing nausea among the people.

I was glad to be alive.

I was fortunate to be able to remain just a step above nausea.

The problem was that most people collapsed and lost consciousness.

Thud, thud.

The heroes fell around me unprotected.

It wasn’t a large area, so only the heroes who had rushed to stop this monster lay sprawled on the ground.

Among those who lost consciousness, I also stood unsteadily.

This can’t be…

“Until the end, until the end, until the end, disrupt! Heh, I let you live because I thought it would be fun to see a powerless girl struggle!”

With magical power unfurling like a magnetic field, I suppressed the explosion’s output as much as possible.

Thanks to that, the people could remain only temporarily unconscious.

The problem was with me.

Clunk, clink, my secured prosthetic arm was forcibly torn off.

It hurt so much that tears welled up, but I couldn’t cry out in pain due to the sensation that was surfacing afterward.

My metallic limbs fell apart chaotically, and I stood up on my own.

“…Ah.”

“d*e. I don’t want to see you anymore.”

The monster declared judgment on me.

Instinctively, I raised my hand.

The dark metal twisted, spilling bl**d as it transformed back into pale flesh.

“Ugh, uaaaaaa!”

There wasn’t any feature like pain blocking found on normal people’s hands.

I saw the heroes who lost consciousness. My body shrank down.

“Ah, ah!”

“Kanna…!”

I heard Yoon Hamin’s voice.

Sounds of hushed murmurs surrounded me.

I felt a sudden pain making it hard to breathe and turned my head.

The monster-controlled greatest being flew from above, casting a shadow over me.

Even so, my gaze was on Yoon Hamin, who was rushing toward me.

It hurts, I don’t want to d*e.

I thought I had done my best, but was that not true at all?

To think that all this was for a final happiness must sound like a madman’s rant.

I clutched my right hand and pressed my head against the ground, silently gazing at him.

“Ugh, Yu, Yoon Hamin…”

I closed my eyes tightly. To endure the pain, I bit my teeth and thrashed around, but it felt impossible to properly regain my senses.

I had already become a being like the monster.

I had made that known to everyone around me, leaving me with nothing to say.

Even if I wasn’t killed by the monster, I would definitely be killed by humans.

So, I gave him one last hint.

“Become a being like a star.”

He might find peace one last time.

He could protect those around him.

I told myself not to use power like this again.

I could only hope he would understand.

And then, something fell above my head.

Ch. 86 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 86

They were desperate to assist the heroes. Thinking to eliminate the monster that had tried to k*ll Kanna first, as they swung their sword, they became so engrossed that they didn't notice Kanna was once again fighting another monster, whether the monster had deliberately targeted Kanna or not.

The problem was that they realized this far too late.

When they turned their head along with the explosion, everything had already ended. They were now cornering one monster, but many heroes had fallen to the hands of the monster that seemed to be its leader.

Amidst the fallen individuals, only one girl managed to rise. She wobbled for a moment, but seeing her get back up was both heart-wrenching and tragic.

Clang, clank. It felt like heavy metal was sliding across the floor. And then Kanna stood up.

What had been attached to her limbs just moments ago were not her original limbs; in front of everyone's gaze, she tore off her limbs and created new ones.

Her prosthetic arm fell between the blazers and a new hand regained balance. The prosthetic leg she had hidden under her stockings was torn away along with the stockings.

Standing on her pure white legs, she raised her pure white arms. And as she blocked the monster's attack with her arms, she screamed and fell.

Here, believing the heroes would finish it off, I approached Kanna.

“Kanna…!”

As I called her name and rushed to help, Kanna let out a voice that seemed half-given up.

“Ugh, Y-you, Yoon Hamin…”

No, don’t make that sound. I don’t want to give up on you.

There must be a way somewhere.

“Become a star.”

What does that mean? Before I could shout about it, before my ability could reach the monster, a monster that had fallen from the sky attacked Kanna first.

SQUISH.

At the sound, I stood frozen with a blank expression. Among the fallen heroes, only Kanna at the center was being attacked by the monster.

Is everyone dead? No, they’re still breathing. Did they lose consciousness in the explosion?

For a moment, as I tried to think calmly, I immediately turned my gaze away.

“Uwaaaa!”

I swung my sword towards the monster. Other heroes seemed to regain their senses and rushed in after assessing the situation.

However, the monster lightly jumped back as if it had seen enough. Watching it take a step back unlike its earlier aggressiveness, I felt inexplicably angry.

“Fight…!”

The moment I swung the sword and unleashed my ability, I felt something rapidly approaching from the side.

“Student! It’s a monster…!”

Then I just needed to slice that first.

The sword emitted light so bright that its shape became hard to see. I felt a hot heat. I gripped a trembling heart that seemed ready to explode at any moment.

And so, I swung the sword at the monster flying in to attack my right.

But the monster grinned and opened its mouth.

“Yum.”

“…?”

My eyes widened.

The moment I swung the sword, the light abruptly went out, and I couldn’t cut the monster’s body. My ability didn’t activate, so the sword merely sliced through the air and couldn’t reach the monster outside its range.

“Delicious.”

Saying that, the monster slowly approached the one that had attacked Kanna.

I couldn’t feel the power of the stars properly. This feeling was new, making it hard for me to shake off my confusion.

I hadn’t become powerless, but it felt like I couldn’t be of any help, causing me to freeze.

Then, I heard the voices of other heroes behind me.

“Don’t let it escape! We need to k*ll at least one more monster this time. Otherwise, next time, ten or even a hundred might rush in!!”

Anyone who has consciousness, move forward! At that cry, each took up their weapons. They rushed to catch the monster trying to flee beyond the barrier.

Monsters tried to block their path, and heroes swung their weapons to defeat them.

I could only stand idly, staring at their backs, unable to follow.

I felt a hand clutching my shoulder.

“Yoon Hamin, snap out of it.”

“W-what?”

It was Sel’s voice. Shaking off my daze and turning my head, she pointed towards where Kanna had been earlier, indicating that I had something else to do.

“I’ll check over there; you go back.”

“No, no… I’ll check too.”

I wanted to know what had happened to Kanna.

I was frustrated knowing that a large monster had crashed into Kanna, but I thought it might not be too late and that I must not give up as I followed Sel.

Inside the barrier, only remnants of monsters remained. If I caught the monsters blocking the escape path of the human, it would be nearly over.

Whether we could catch the monster or not would now be up to the other heroes.

So, in that logic, I should be confirming the survivors here with the other heroes, alongside Sel.

I dashed towards Kanna, whom I deemed to be in the most urgent danger, leaving the other heroes behind.

It looked like a monster that was trying to devour her had crashed into her, but it seemed it had died upon impact, not moving at all.

“Ugh.”

I heard Sel’s groan. It was caused by the horrifying spectacle revealing itself after I had knocked the monster from Kanna.

They say a person’s neck can break when hit by falling water balloons from a height, and it was a fitting description as Kanna’s neck was twisted at a 90-degree angle.

Her head appeared to be broken somewhere as bl**d was oozing out along with some unidentified liquid diluting it.

Sel covered her mouth, and I sank to the ground, kneeling before her.

“Kanna…”

I didn’t know where to put my hands. I wanted to shift my position to face her turned head, but seeing the face just before d*ath made me doubt whether I could hold up under this.

My breath trembled. I wanted to shout how could this happen.

Of course, not everything would flow toward a good outcome. There were limits as a student, and it might have even been difficult to explain to someone else.

But still, must the result of the efforts thought to be one’s best end up like this?

My tightly clenched fists shook with rage.

“…Ugh.”

What on earth does it mean to become a star?

I could only frown as I couldn’t even grasp that meaning.

At the very least, I had to organize the corpse, but my heart wouldn’t settle, so I couldn’t hastily put my hands on her body.

Limbs scattered around Kanna. As I stared blankly at the prosthetic arm and leg, I looked back at her pure white limbs.

I had no idea what standard dictated this would happen.

Kanna had become like this after the sudden explosion…

She must still be alive; her pulse is still beating. It was an explosion made of unrefined magical power, and Kanna had endured, so she could withstand it again.

The barrier hadn’t been filled yet, and unrefined magical power was still flowing through the gap.

Please, it has to be that way.

“Yoon Hamin?”

Ignoring Sel’s call, I reached out my trembling hand. I tried to touch her twisted head, but I was afraid that if I made a mistake, it would come off.

What am I supposed to do? I wish someone would just tell me.

“Yoon Hamin! Snap out of it!”

It was surely an explosion caused by unrefined magical power. If Kanna could regenerate her limbs because of that, then perhaps like the monster, she could also regenerate her body using just unrefined magical power.

I had to turn it back before my heart stopped, before my brain got damaged.

“I-I need a totem! That might save Kanna…”

There was no guarantee that taking her beyond the barrier would work. Therefore, I needed to find a totem condensed with unrefined magical power, but Sel, beside me, seemed intent on stopping me.

“This is already…”

“She’s alive, she’ll still be alive, I’m sure of it!”

I urged her insistently. I wanted to declare it, and so I spoke even more firmly, squeezing the words out.

Throwing aside the desperate wish that she must not d*e, I lifted my body.

I couldn’t touch Kanna. If I did, it felt like she would just crumble away, as if her gradually weakening pulse would seem to vanish… Seeing Kanna bleeding profusely made me realize I had very little time left.

Too much bl**d is flowing. I have to stop this somehow. With that thought, I turned away from Sel’s cries and began to walk away.

When I barely retrieved a totem from the battlefield and returned, Sel groaned.

“Yoon Hamin, where on earth…”

“Just a moment.”

Leaving Sel, who was checking on the other heroes to see if they were alive or dead behind me, I brought the one totem I had retrieved to her body.

“You, that…!”

Realizing what was in my hand, Sel gasped and shouted. However, the fact that something like a totem was about to enter Kanna’s body made that surprise pale in comparison to the greater shock.

Leaving Sel, who was left speechless, I swallowed hard.

Please, get better. Please, please don’t d*e and live on.

You’re definitely the hero who saved people properly this time.

You saved countless lives around you.

Even if they are not these heroes, you’ve saved many lives.

So, you’re a valuable person. No matter how low your grades are or how much others may ridicule you. You overcome that and move to do what must be done…

As I earnestly prayed, I heard a creaking sound.

Sel, who was next to me, and the other heroes were staring at the spectacle.

The neck that had been grotesquely twisted moved back to the opposite side with a crack. Then it returned to a normal human neck.

“Cough!”

She seemed to have instinctively coughed, but she didn’t appear to have regained her composure.

Still, I thought it was a relief that she didn’t d*e. Every second was critical; if I had been a second too late, Kanna wouldn’t have been in this world anymore…

“Yoon Hamin, what the hell did you just do?”

Having briefly fallen into sentimentality, Sel grabbed me and spat out in a sharp tone.

“D-do you know what you just gave her…!?”

“……”

I worried about how my actions might be perceived by others. But more than that, I wished for Kanna to live, so I didn’t hesitate.

Sel seemed taken aback, letting out a sigh of disbelief, and she couldn’t articulate anything further. At that moment, another hero approached and spoke up.

“…I can’t just let what I just saw slide.”

Ch. 87 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 87

What do you mean by saying I can’t just stand by? A person is about to d*e, and what’s so wrong with saving them by any means necessary?

Of course, to others, it might look like I was forcibly bringing back someone who had already died. Or they might have been horrified by the monstrous vitality that was unlike a human.

“If we can save them, we should save them.”

I hugged Kanna, who was lying unconscious.

Her body, which had been grotesquely twisted, had returned to some extent, which was reassuring but also painful.

“But with a head that badly injured and a broken neck, isn’t she dead?”

“I could clearly feel her heart beating…”

I could only respond like that. Then the hero opened his mouth as if to say that what he saw was also the truth.

“Strange liquid was flowing from her head. Isn’t that already cerebrospinal fluid?”

“No, that’s not it. She’s… still breathing.”

I denied his words and placed my hand on her. A small breath could be felt from Kanna’s lips. That was clear evidence that she was alive.

The pulse that had been faint moments ago was surely proof that she was still alive.

The hero seemed to think that I was right; he lowered his head for a moment and then continued with another topic.

“Even if she’s alive, what you did was put a monster’s parts into a human, wasn’t it? Of course, it’s best to save someone if you can. But if that person’s life becomes distorted because of it, then how will you take responsibility?”

Upon hearing that, I slowly lifted my head.

The hero with short, crimson hair brushed it back coolly. He didn’t seem like the same hero who had been fighting here all this time.

He was likely a hero who had rushed over from the other side with support troops.

At first, I thought he was going to attack Kanna’s condition, but he was scolding me.

While saving a person is good, it appeared that he was questioning how I would take responsibility for that life if it was saved in such a way.

“No matter how much of an academy student you are, and even if you will eventually become a hero who has to handle your own affairs, it is that girl who will have to live that life in the end.”

“…I’m sorry. But I really wanted to save her because she is my friend.”

I lowered my head and gently stroked Kanna’s hair as she lay unconscious.

“…I see.”

Then the hero, perhaps feeling he could say no more, moved with his weapon in hand.

“What is your name?”

“Sel.”

“I am Ruder. As support troops are wrapping up here, please tell the other heroes to step back and rest for a bit.”

“Ah, yes!”

Sel moved to inform the other heroes of what Ruder, who had introduced himself, had said. The nearby heroes began to carry the unconscious ones, one by one, to a safe place, and I, too, hesitated before lifting Kanna.

“…….”

My breath, my hands trembled.

Without the metal prosthetic arm or leg, her surprisingly light body felt unfamiliar. Ruder seemed to remain silent, not knowing the proper situation, but the heroes who had been fighting must have seen it, causing unnecessary worry.

Thinking about it, I hadn’t seen how Kanna had fought either.

All the heroes who had focused on battling that insane monster were now unconscious, so it was evident that it would be difficult even to understand what had happened.

“Yoon Hamin.”

“Yes?”

I lifted my head. I hadn’t expected Sel to call for me while gathering the other heroes.

As I stared blankly into those blue eyes, she averted her gaze, her eyes shaking.

“…What on earth happened to your friend?”

That gaze fell on Kanna’s fallen prosthetic arm and leg. The metal hidden beneath her blazer and the metal that pretended to be human flesh under her stockings seemed to etch themselves into her vision.

However, I had no way of knowing as I hadn’t heard any explanation from Kanna. Even she might not know, but perhaps she had absorbed unrefined magical power and regenerated because it resembled the body of a monster.

“I don’t know.”

I shook my head. I really had no idea.

Seeing that the monster’s fist that had cut that wrist had regrown, it could either be common or require some special ability.

Therefore, I couldn’t even offer a proper hypothesis, let alone a definitive answer.

“…Still, don’t worry. This child must have fought hard, too.”

“Yes…”

Sel also seemed to understand that.

That Kanna had desperately unleashed her abilities against the monster. And that she had defended people amidst the explosion.

Whether by the monster’s intent or not, it could be considered fortunate that it had ended with her merely losing consciousness.

“Ah, that monster is really strong. No matter how much you push it, it doesn’t think about dying.”

“But we caught one of them.”

“Oh right. We caught one of them.”

Only two of the three monsters had fled beyond the barrier. The heroes, unable to cross the barrier overflowing with unrefined magical power, hesitated then began to focus on eliminating the remaining monster.

Watching that, Sel moved again.

I paced while reflecting on Kanna's words, asking me to become a being like the stars. Her white feet, perhaps from not wearing shoes, felt slightly dirty against the bare ground.

Thinking I would need to brush off a bit when I got home, I trudged away from the battlefield.

Considering I didn't want anyone's gaze or attention, I thought about just heading home, but after seeing Kanna, I realized a more important thing and turned my steps toward the hospital.

"…Is there no guardian or family member?"

"Just a moment."

After hearing that, I reached for the device in Kanna's blazer pocket and pulled it out. I then accessed the contact list in the device and felt a moment of suffocation.

Homeroom Teacher. Orca. Yoon Hamin.

"…It seems there isn't anyone."

"There are instances like that. If she's an academy student, then the homeroom teacher would suffice."

"Yes, yes… Then I'll try to contact them."

I said that and took out my device to make a call.

After placing the call, I saw the teacher entering the hospital. Seeing her turquoise hair made me feel relieved, and I sprang from the chair to signal

her.

“Teacher!”

“Oh, Yoon Hamin! So here you are. Where’s Kanna?”

“She hasn’t gone through the admission procedures formally yet, but she’s lying on that bed over there. It seems they made accommodations for us given the circumstances.”

As the barrier crumbled, the heroes’ bl**d began to flow. There was no way to block the barrier from a safe distance, so it couldn’t be helped.

Depending on the severity of injuries, there were certainly injured persons, and even several dead.

While it would be much faster for those with relatively minor symptoms to find another empty hospital to admit an urgent patient, Kanna, having fought a monster, was one of the most urgent patients to verify whether she was dead or alive.

Even if she was not dead, using that brief moment of life to forcefully keep her attached could not bring assurance.

Whether it should be called fortunate or not, it was indeed a great relief that she could regenerate her body and escape from the brink of d*ath due to receiving magical power, perhaps due to the monster’s characteristics.

“I, I’m just the teacher and haven’t received a proper report. What on earth happened?”

“…It seems Kanna was fighting to protect the other heroes and ended up this way. It was more serious back then as well.”

It was literally “it seems.”

Only those who saw it for certain could answer. Only those who experienced it could provide answers.

However, in that urgent situation, the only ones who were looking at that monster were the people who were confronting it, and those people were all unconscious and unable to testify.

Even I, while helping the other heroes fight the monster, had no idea what had happened to Kanna.

Surely, someone must have seen Kanna. I thought it might be a bit difficult to find that someone.

“That can’t be. But…”

The teacher’s eyes shook. It seemed unbelievable that Kanna, who hadn’t demonstrated her ability during the practical exam, had fought like that.

Eventually, realizing that I had no reason to lie, I sealed my lips.

“…I understand for now. I just need to proceed with the admission procedures, right?”

“Yes, since Kanna has no guardian…”

“Yes, I understand.”

The teacher abruptly turned and headed to the reception desk to begin Kanna’s admission process.

“Yoon Hamin.”

“Yes?”

I followed and watched, and the teacher quietly continued.

“Is everything going well?”

“…Mentoring?”

“Yes, I was wondering if you were getting along well with the hero you

were paired with.”

“I think it’s alright.”

Having finished the paperwork, the teacher looked up at me for a moment.

“I already know that the mentoring partner’s agency is different from the practical training period. That was likely because of Kanna. But Kanna, right now is most, most…”

“Doubtful? Or is her very existence a danger?”

The teacher trailed off, but the subsequent thoughts were suggested, causing me to feel choked up first.

“Even before, and even now… Do you still think there are doubts about how hard Kanna fought? Or do you think she’s dangerous?”

As I shouted that out, the teacher pressed her lips tightly shut and turned away. Then she removed herself from the spot.

“I don’t know. As a teacher, I don’t want to push a student away like that, but I’m just a teacher too. I just don’t want to cause trouble to other students or heroes because of hasty judgments.”

I trembled my fists, then gradually relaxed and lowered my gaze.

Ch. 88 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 88

The ignorant person is more confident.

Only when knowing nothing was I composed.

I was sure that Kanna would survive if I did this.

That’s why I wasn’t in a rush to think.

In fact, I really thought that Kanna’s breath had stabilized after doing so.

However, after returning from the academy’s routine the next day and hearing the doctor’s opinion with the teacher, I felt my head go blank.

“I’m not sure if I should talk about this in front of the student, but since the teacher has permitted it, I’ll tell you. There has been some damage to the brain. It seems cerebrospinal fluid has leaked from somewhere, but we can’t find out where the gap is, so it’s currently difficult to address.”

I felt a chill run down my spine at those words.

The teacher frowned as if something was strange and tilted their head.

“…Cerebrospinal fluid? Wait a moment, can you figure out what happened?”

“There’s nothing to figure out. There are no bruises or anything to indicate what the situation is. It’s just that there’s less cerebrospinal fluid than normal, and there’s some damage somewhere…”

“Wait a moment, Yoon Hamin.”

After hearing the doctor’s words, the teacher turned to me, perhaps finding too many strange points.

The question was thrown at me.

“Do you know how Kanna ended up like that?”

“Ah, that…”

In response to the teacher’s probing question, I communicated the details to the teacher and the doctor.

Saying there was less cerebrospinal fluid than normal was a truth I had no choice but to reveal.

While fighting a monster, I was suddenly caught up in an explosion made of unrefined magical power, which caused my limbs to regenerate.

Then, while fighting, Kanna’s head had been struck by the hard body of a new type of monster as she groaned in pain.

Because of that, it seemed like something was leaking from Kanna’s head, and I opened my mouth, thinking it might be cerebrospinal fluid.

I hoped that the doctor, who seemed to be struggling to find where the cerebrospinal fluid was leaking from due to Kanna’s body being too intact, would find a proper solution.

The doctor scratched his head and looked closely at the file in his hand, frowning.

After listening to me, it seemed he was organizing something in his mind and let out a small groan.

“For now, the lack of cerebrospinal fluid is something often seen in elderly patients, but if it’s just leaking physically, it seems like it could potentially be restored. It would be even better if the leaking gap has been filled. But the problem is…”

I tried to concentrate on what he was saying.

I hoped for some plan to emerge to overcome this situation.

But the world seemed harsh, only presenting me with painful circumstances.

“Because it recovered too neatly, it’s difficult to determine whether the skull fracture is a linear fracture, a depression fracture, or a basal skull fracture, making it hard to proceed with treatment. Of course, we’ll need to intervene overall, but we might face difficulties, and given that this involves the brain…”

Upon hearing those words, I wanted to deny reality.

I didn’t want to accept the fact that even though she was clearly alive, she might only be a living corpse.

No, that can’t be true. Surely, she could be healed by a totem.

Her limbs regenerated because of the explosion of unrefined magical power, and I could heal Kanna’s head and all her wounds with some kind of totem.

Could the doctor be lying? Is he saying that treatment isn’t possible because there are no totems scattered by the monster?

Surely, there would be a way to treat her. I had a bad thought that perhaps he was just postponing the treatment because there were too many people ready to help.

“Doctor… is there, is there no other treatment method?”

“I’m sorry, but as far as I know, there are no definitive methods for research

and treatment of the brain. There are diseases related to the brain that cannot be treated…”

I shook my head at that remark.

“It can’t be, no, that…”

I shook my head to negate it, but I couldn’t say in front of them that I had to feed Kanna with the totem that the monster had discarded.

Perhaps sensing my distress, the teacher quietly watched from the side and then spoke to comfort me.

“Yoon Hamin, if you trust the doctor, a good outcome will surely follow.”

“…Yes.”

I had no choice but to nod weakly.

In the single room, it was just Kanna and me.

The unconscious Kanna lay quietly, with machines hooked to her on both sides.

Beeping sounds signaled her life, but she could not regain any vitality.

It seemed that being alive and unable to open her eyes meant something like this, making my brow furrow involuntarily.

I couldn’t shake the guilt of thinking that my hasty actions might be causing difficulties in her treatment.

Moreover, I regretted that if I had provided help more quickly, if I had left everything else to the heroes and just stayed by Kanna’s side, things might have been different.

But would I have been able to endure that explosion?

No, even the heroes who couldn’t withstand it lost consciousness; I

wouldn’t have been able to endure it either.

Yet still, knowing that Kanna was in such a situation kept my worries from fading.

Surely this wasn’t the best I could do. No, it wasn’t even close.

If I had been faster, I might have been able to strike away the monster falling onto Kanna’s head.

No, more than whether I could or couldn’t, it was more important that I hadn’t done so.

I had firmly believed that she was alive, that I had brought her here, but now feeling like a living corpse constricted my chest.

She was breathing, her heartbeat was strong, but the impact to her head was so severe that it caused her neck to bend sharply.

Kanna’s head was twisted at a right angle.

Her head had burst, and cerebrospinal fluid had leaked.

bl**d and clear liquid.

The lack of even a groan made one begin to wonder if she was truly dead.

Ah, I wanted to look away. I didn’t want to believe she was dead. I believed she could be saved. I thought that if I acted before her heart stopped, before her brain was damaged, we could save her, but that wasn’t the case.

I was like a dying ember desperately trying to stay alive.

I wanted to believe that the faint heartbeat wasn’t dead yet.

And it was because I didn’t give up that she must still be breathing. Her heart must still be beating.

“…Then what, what can I do…”

I clenched my fist tightly and grasped it with my other hand.

I leaned my forehead against my clasped hands resting on the bed.

It was my incompetence, helplessness, and ignorance that had brought Kanna to this state.

Furthermore, since being eaten by that strange monster, my ability had also been limited.

I was so weak that I couldn’t even assert that I could protect Kanna if anything happened to her in the future.

What could I even do?

I had confidently proclaimed that I would protect her, yet now, what could I actually do?

I felt such a sense of injustice and sadness at being unable to protect even Kanna while I stupidly occupied myself with other matters.

My heart tightened.

I wished she would stay alive.

“…Kanna.”

But no answer came back.

The thought that she could become a vegetable still lingered.

I prayed that it wouldn’t come to that.

But the doctor was cold.

All I could do was hope it wouldn’t happen, and he only said he would do his best.

While I thought that was the doctor’s best response, it was an answer I couldn’t be satisfied with, for I didn’t want that future.

“Ugh, ugh…”

I didn’t want to accept it.

No matter how much I turned my eyes away, nothing would change, yet I continued to look away.

Kanna might be dead.

No, she hasn’t died. Her heart is still beating; even if it’s a dying ember, I would have tried to keep that pulse alive.

Kanna could have died.

That’s why I had done my best at that moment. If I hadn’t taken action then, she would surely be dead, and without that method, I wouldn’t have been able to save Kanna.

I couldn’t protect Kanna.

That fact was inescapable, and it made me swallow my pain.

If only I had stayed by Kanna’s side from the beginning, when I think of that, the fallen heroes around her come to mind.

If that had been the case, I would have collapsed too, and there would have been no one to treat Kanna with a totem, and she would have died just like that, sending a chill down my spine.

Could we have defeated that monster? Even with twenty heroes charging in, it didn’t seem possible, so there were clearly limits.

The clock pointed to 10 o’clock.

I had to go home, rest, and go to school tomorrow, but here I sat on the hospital bed, blankly staring at Kanna.

I struggled to hold back the emotions welling up inside me as I looked at her.

I wanted to scream and beg her not to d*e, to wake up and show me her voice.

No matter how much I reached out, my words only circled and disappeared into the air, so I couldn’t even open my mouth.

I was so afraid of the silence that returned.

Ch. 89 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 89

As a day passed, and then another, seeing Kanna, who showed no signs of waking up, only heightened my anxiety.

To figure out how Kanna was injured and what would happen if cerebrospinal fluid escaped, I pressed the device.

I had no choice but to keep Kanna alive, but it was hard to feel good about it when that meant the treatment would be delayed.

Not knowing how she was injured made it difficult for the doctor to make a diagnosis or proceed, and I could only feel frustrated by that fact.

If cerebrospinal fluid was insufficient, there could be dizziness and ringing in the ears. There seemed to be other symptoms, but not seeing them made me wonder if I should delve into academic papers.

The topic of cerebrospinal fluid deficiency had not been covered in depth. The doctor hadn’t emphasized its importance either, and didn’t appear relieved when he said there was no leakage of cerebrospinal fluid.

If that’s the case, what was more important was how directly Kanna’s brain had been impacted.

Not knowing how her head had been broken made it impossible to understand what kind of damage had been done to her brain.

On the surface, she looked too fine for it to be difficult to notice the damaged areas.

Perhaps that’s why treatment for Kanna was only progressing slowly.

Sitting slouched on the hospital bed, I stared blankly at Kanna’s figure.

Where had her head been injured? It was already healed, and I couldn’t tell where she had bumped or broken it.

Why had this happened? But if it hadn’t, she might have died.

Although she was still alive, I wondered if I was just forcing someone who should already be gone to stay. Was Kanna suffering because of me?

Still, wouldn’t it be much better to be alive?

But if she continued not to open her eyes, could she truly be called a living person?

Why wasn’t she waking up? Fracture of the skull? Depressed fracture? Basilar skull fracture? I tried to learn more about the terms the doctor had mentioned, but even though I could read the words displayed on the device, there was nothing I could actually do.

I was just leaving the aftermath of what had already happened here.

Even with her heart beating and pulse existing, Kanna didn’t even seem to consider opening her eyes.

I felt like I was going to go crazy from frustration and clenched my fists, but those trembling hands didn’t go far.

I was afraid that if I held Kanna’s hand, it would fall off immediately and that if I caressed her face, her neck would break again.

I didn’t want her to remain like this, but being told that she could have injured her brain made me worry that if Kanna regained consciousness, it might only make things harder for her.

If it came to that, would I be able to bear the consequences of what I had done?

At that moment, I remembered the voice of a hero named Ruder.

“If you can live, living is best. But what if that person’s life is distorted because of it? How are you going to take responsibility if things go wrong?”

That voice, which made me aware of what I had done instead of telling me that person was already dead, lingered in my mind.

There’s no such thing as a person who should d*e, but if someone who shouldn’t be alive continues to live, is it human nature to just watch in a daze, not being able to instantly accept and understand the situation?

And now, three days later, I was able to calmly reflect on that day’s memories.

“…This is strange.”

Kanna Aurora. The condition of the student who was desperately being followed by Yoon Hamin was utterly miserable.

To be frank, I felt like it was bad enough to consider her already ruined, with a body that could easily be described as a corpse.

Such a sight was a horrific scene one might see when someone committed s*icide.

It was strange. It had to be strange.

Why was I silent back then?

Ah, right. My mentee, Yoon Hamin, was so desperate that I didn’t want to pour cold water on him.

Hugging a corpse that looked like it wouldn’t be strange to be dead, I

dreaded the thought of grabbing his ankle as he ran to find something while insisting there was still a pulse.

In such situations, allowing someone to do everything they thought they could do would enable Yoon Hamin to let go of the lingering regrets and remorse he may have held inside.

But contrary to my intentions, Yoon Hamin found something and handed it to Kanna.

He inserted a “totem,” which seemed related to monsters, into a body that could easily be called a corpse, and after that, I could see Kanna’s neck returning to its original state.

The bleeding appeared to stop.

Unable to accept the bizarre situation and unwilling to trample on Yoon Hamin’s emotions, I kept my mouth shut, not able to say that it wasn’t right to cling to someone who should be dead.

And now, I had brought out that hesitation.

In front of someone I thought I understood very well, I asked.

“Um, Boss. Is there any healing ability in the totem made by monsters?”

When I asked, Reg tilted his head.

“No, I’ve never heard of such a thing.”

“Really…?”

“I’m not sure why you’re asking this. Did you see something suspicious?”

Taking this opportunity, I decided to share what I had seen.

After all, Kanna had already garnered a lot of attention, so even if I didn’t say anything, the truth would come out eventually.

The thing that concerned me was the harrowing scene that came to mind when I brought this up, but I could only swallow it down and calm my churning stomach.

The prosthetic arm and leg on Kanna's body had fallen off on their own, and her original limbs regenerated.

Even with her head broken and neck severely twisted, she stabilized her breathing after absorbing the totem.

After I stated those two facts, the boss began to think seriously, wearing a grave expression.

As I waited for an answer quietly, the boss seemed unsure and suggested another approach.

"Then we'll just have to ask Kanna directly about it. I had initially warned her not to get involved with monsters, so it's questionable whether the association will look at it positively because she fought."

That statement felt a bit chilling, and I sweated as I asked.

"Um, Hamin might not take it well; is there any other way? Besides, considering the circumstances, Kanna may have been protecting others when there was an explosion nearby."

"That's a matter of perspective, and it hasn't been proven as fact, so it's not worth discussing."

Despite such efforts, the boss continued speaking, as if this was simply his opinion.

"What needs to be discussed is that she disobeyed orders. Why she disobeyed and what she did after disobeying."

"…Is that really necessary?"

"That's how order is maintained, and peace blossoms within that order."

“But she’s just a student; is it really necessary to apply such a strict standard?”

“True. If you feel that way, I could add something, but the decision is not mine.”

To be fair, the boss’s cold way of speaking stemmed from the association’s attitude.

No matter how influential they were, in the end, it was an individual’s opinion, and Reg, as the boss of Regnum, was just one of the many agency heads, a person with a slightly stronger voice among numerous heroes.

“If there’s a positive evaluation of battling well even if it’s labeled as solo action, wouldn’t it be viewed positively? What else would you call someone who fights desperately against monsters, if not a hero?”

Yet, the boss seemed to have a small hope.

In the existence of Kanna Aurora.

“…Boss?”

“I hope to call both her and Yoon Hamin together once this uproar is over.”

“……”

The student Kanna didn’t possess a particularly powerful magical ability. The problem was that she utilized a power that felt most similar to that of the monsters.

If we were talking about outstanding abilities, it might still only be at the level of Yoon Hamin, who was still using his powers in a fantastical way.

There certainly were extraordinary abilities among the other upper-tier students of the academy.

A student named Orca, the eldest daughter of the Lamiris family and the future head, had an earth-based ability that was said to be unparalleled compared to her peers, despite it being commonly seen.

Of course, these were all rumors, and since I had never met Orca, I had no definitive judgments to make.

Anyway, it seemed that one had to be at Yoon Hamin's level to be truly talented, and Kanna was… well…

But perhaps the boss found something interesting in Kanna's other side, or he was intrigued.

Even with such a body, and despite not thinking she was strong, her fighting against monsters seemed to earn her significant points.

Even if the boss said that, I still questioned whether Kanna could truly function properly.

Especially since it had been like this…

"…I'm feeling a bit unwell; I'll step out for a bit."

"Okay, in that case, why not take a half-day off?"

"Excuse me?"

"You seem to be feeling unwell after witnessing such a horrific scene, right?"

"Ah, yes… Then… I'll rest a bit in the afternoon."

I felt grateful that I had time to go home and clear my head, and I left the place.

Ch. 90 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 90

It was the weekend, but my duties remained unchanged. I settled into the hospital bed in this ward and watched Kanna.

As time passed and I listened to the doctor’s words, I became increasingly frustrated by the reality that all I could do was contemplate those words and observe.

“For now, we are preparing for the worst-case scenario for the surgery. The situation hasn’t worsened yet, and she doesn’t seem to be recovering consciousness, so we will keep monitoring and gather information.”

“Yes, yes…”

In response to those words, I nodded blankly. It only felt wearying to realize that I couldn’t do anything.

If only I could bring a totem to Kanna, maybe I could fill the voids I had lost, even if just for a moment.

The reason Kanna wasn’t recovering was likely that she had exhausted all her magical power healing her broken neck and shattered head, right?

But before, she had overflowed with abilities to the point of rampage, and at that time, her prosthetic arm and leg hadn’t fallen off, had they? What was the reason?

Sitting on the chair by the hospital bed, I looked at Kanna, who lay like a corpse, exhaling her diminishing breaths.

I saw. Kanna fighting for others.

To others, it might have seemed like I was too biased in favor of Kanna. But hadn’t Kanna known things that others didn’t?

Heroes are surely good people, and there must be a clear purpose behind their noble cause. But I couldn’t accept it.

If Kanna knew something, if she had stayed silent because she didn’t want to be noticed by the monsters, what would have happened inside this barrier? It would have only been after sacrificing the hearts of hundreds or thousands of heroes that she would finally realize she would be crushed to d*ath by the new type of monster.

If she hadn’t been introduced to the concept of a totem, she would have been toyed with by the monsters repeatedly, unable to do anything as they kept battering the barrier.

Furthermore, even when she was dragged away, when she was chased to the point of trauma, she ultimately chose to fight, even on the brink of d*ath. Isn’t that what a true hero looks like?

Yet the noble cause seemed to want to distance itself from Kanna for the sake of others’ peace.

Because they had lived peacefully until now, they suppressed anything that seemed out of place with the sole desire to maintain the current situation.

Surely there are good people, and some heroes may think like me, but just thinking that way doesn’t mean everything will turn in that direction.

“Kanna…”

I took Kanna’s soft hand in mine.

It was different from the prosthetic she had before, covered in what felt like human skin, providing only a cold and hard touch. This hand had bones, flesh, and warmth.

Ah, I could feel the pulse in her hand. I felt her body heat.

I felt an overwhelming urge to cry at that realization, so I tightly closed my lips. I suppressed the emotions that wanted to overflow and whispered words to her that I couldn’t let her hear.

“Wake up… The heroes you saved, they opened their eyes…”

I told her that.

They say that when people regain consciousness, they often hear voices, and I wished she could be happy to hear that story. It would be even better if she woke up in joy.

“Surely, since you saved them, those heroes will say good things to you. They will definitely say that you weren’t related to the monsters. You bravely fought against the monsters, and they will testify to that… that you won’t be dragged away…”

As I spoke, my voice trembled more and more. I stuttered, struggling to get the words out.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry… I don’t even understand the things you’ve said…”

I wanted to listen to what Kanna had to say, but I couldn’t understand the meanings behind her words, and I burst into tears.

“Become a being like a star,” what could that possibly mean?

Kanna thought she was going to d*e. So, in her mind, that must have been her final words, but no matter how I thought about it, I couldn’t grasp their meaning.

So, I wanted her to wake up and explain their meaning to me.

Could someone like me be called a hero? Of course, if it means that the citizens can feel safe, then someone like me could be called a hero.

But being called just ‘hero,’ a title that’s merely a profession, doesn’t mean that I could truly become one. After all, I was this weak.

I couldn’t accept the idea that someone must be sacrificed for the noble cause. I couldn’t even distance anyone for the sake of finding peace.

While I might be selfish and only think of myself, I wished for Kanna.

If Kanna were here, I felt that everything could surely be resolved.

Look at the situation now. The barrier has collapsed, and three monsters have come, but before any harm came to the civilian homes, didn’t we manage to stop them all at the barrier?

Because they now knew of the existence of the totem, the heroes began searching for and eliminating the totem.

Since they knew the weaknesses of monsters, they could also deal with the new types of monsters.

The heroes sacrificed themselves, jumped in when the monsters charged, and also, when explosions occurred, they made sure that surrounding heroes didn’t d*e and remained unconscious at most.

It was all possible because of Kanna. Now, no matter what noble cause it was, it shouldn’t be a reason to push Kanna away.

It was saying that we should not drive away the person who was more heroic than anyone else in the name of peace for all.

But even if I shouted this inside, no one would listen. I didn’t even think that just speaking it would change anyone’s mind.

It’s unreasonable. How could the world be like this?

Think about it. This time, wasn’t it the monsters who weren’t trying to k*ll? Then wouldn’t Kanna’s very existence be the most bothersome thing for the monsters?

Because of Kanna’s existence, the monsters often destroy the barriers and invade. From that standpoint, Kanna could seem like a disrupting element to the peace inside this barrier.

But conversely, the monsters were trying to k*ll Kanna, going so far as to use their own monsters and pushing their own kin to d*ath. Couldn’t that fact alone value Kanna?

If there’s value in her existence, they would try to utilize her rather than reject her.

But I wondered if I was thinking too leniently, so I tilted my head again.

This was all just my thought, not Kanna’s.

It was the question of whether I could take responsibility for the one I had saved if, after saving her “by any means,” the method created obstacles to her survival.

It meant I couldn’t offer Kanna a life of being utilized just to ensure she wouldn’t be rejected.

Frustration came and went.

I couldn’t understand why the narrative was flowing in this direction. The situation seemed that desperate.

What am I to do? How can I protect Kanna?

Thinking it through, the people inside the barrier were already being protected by many heroes. Just a while ago, I had felt that having heroes was meaningless, and it was nice to have them around, but now I could clearly feel their presence.

The heroes had thrown themselves to protect the people and struggled to find peace upon their sacrifices.

Of course, not everyone was protected or kept safe, but overall, I could say that heroes were the reason the losses were minimized as much as possible.

Then, who was protecting Kanna?

If heroes, the association, and Kanna were always being pushed away for breaking the peace by drawing in monsters, who was Kanna supposed to depend on?

It was doubtful whether she could protect herself at all, and even if she was that capable, I questioned whether she could endure such a world alone.

Relying on good heroes is nice, but there are already precedents.

I couldn’t allow her to lose limbs again this time. With so many heroes dead, it couldn’t end just with limbs.

So, I wanted to stop that at all costs.

I won’t let you d*e.

I won’t let you leave.

I hope you live longer and show me.

What you desire, what you wanted to do.

And tell me the things you held inside, the words you wanted to say.

If no one can protect you, then I will protect you.

Even now, I can’t feel the strength of the stars because of what the monsters have done, but I will undoubtedly find it again and put you at ease. I will become stronger and stronger so that other heroes can’t harm you.

Even if everyone says you’re last place, looking at you like you just came to get a job, I know.

I can understand because I’ve watched you from the side.

You are more heroic than anyone from the academy, more heroic than any hero.

Even after going through things that would leave a trauma, even with the fear of not knowing when the monsters would chase after you again, even after losing limbs, even knowing that the next mistake could mean execution, how could I abandon you, who fights for humanity?

“You—”

Just as I tried to reassure the unconscious Kanna with my words, saying that I would protect her, my words trailed off.

“……”

Something unusual happened to Kanna, who was laid in bed. Her eyes, not even having entered the operating room once, fluttered open slightly.

It seemed she was trying to confirm where she was, and soon her gaze turned to me.

“Kanna…!”

She woke up. But how did she do that? She hadn’t undergone surgery, nor had anything been done for her?

No, more importantly, this was a moment to be glad she had woken up.

For now…

“Who?”

For now… what was it?

Gripping my pounding heart, my lips, which had been rising, froze and couldn’t move.

“…It’s me, it’s Yoon Hamin.”

She doesn’t remember? Could it be that she forgot me?

That can’t be! Please tell me that’s not true.

It was not a good idea to press someone who had just woken up, so I couldn’t say anything more, but the air got caught in my throat, making it hard to speak.

“Kanna…”

“Ah, yes. It’s Hamin.”

What a relief. I let out a big sigh of relief, but then she spoke something odd.

“…You look different.”

As if she recognized me but was seeing me for the first time.

Ch. 91 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 91

If there is a god in the world, this should not have happened. I simply could not understand why this was happening.

I could not fully grasp the situation. She was not a stranger to me, yet she treated me like someone she had never met before, like a person from her memory. It was hard to accept what kind of world she was facing.

How could she act like she was meeting me for the first time while knowing who I was?

Before entering the academy, surely no one knew my name, but how could this be?

If she had memory loss, I wanted to know from where to where her memory had faded and from what point her world was being replayed.

If things continued like this, Kanna would face a painful situation without being able to accept it. I had to do something to prevent that.

It felt maddening. It was difficult to gauge the symptoms, and although she looked fine on the outside, I was overwhelmed by the reality that there must be some kind of loss somewhere. I couldn’t help but feel a crumpling expression, wondering if this was what someone with a head injury felt like.

“…Kanna, you are, um…”

I could not say anything.

With my words repeatedly failing me, I could only lower my head in the end. Kanna silently watched me, then tilted her head as she looked at her clothes.

“…What? Am I hospitalized? Why…?”

“Well, it’s because I fought with a monster…”

“A monster…?”

It felt like we were not communicating at all.

Thinking about her recognizing me, it felt like it was around March. It was even before she faced a monster, so I couldn’t help but think that way.

In a way, I felt relieved. The fact that she had memory loss and knew the point from which her memories were replaying might be somewhat helpful in understanding the situation and making progress.

“Just… some things happened.”

“But why am I with you?”

“…….”

“I’m Kanna… but that’s strange, you’re not my friend, are you?”

The atmosphere felt different. Before attending the academy, was Kanna a bit brighter, perhaps more cheerful?

An innocent question flew in without malice.

I found it difficult to respond to her question about why she was occupying a hospital bed when we were not even friends.

The reality was that from the moment I enrolled, I had only spent time with Orca, who claimed the second place, and didn’t even pay attention to Kanna, who was in last place, so I felt a weight in my mouth.

“That’s…”

I had nothing to say to Kanna when she asked why someone who was not her friend was taking care of her.

But then again, it was impossible to remain completely silent. Even if I took her home, all of her belongings were at my house. Since I was living there, I had to tell her that. But how could I explain that to Kanna when all her memories had returned to that place?

As my gaze wavered, I cautiously and arduously opened my mouth.

“It’s May now.”

“……What? Huh?”

Seeing Kanna look puzzled made my heart ache even more.

For her, there was no process of becoming friends, and suddenly having the result of being friends shoved in her face made me think that if I were Kanna, I would have a hard time dealing with it.

But I had to explain, so I spoke of the reality that Kanna might find hard to accept.

“It’s May now… and you and I are friends…”

I even wondered if it was blessed that the painful memories would fly away.

Forgetting the time I was dragged by a monster, the days spent depressed as the last place and being ignored or laughed at by others would vanish, and thought that if I could also forget being torn apart by so-called heroes, maybe I could be happier. I felt a sense of self-loathing for thinking that way.

“And, by chance, you’re staying at my house too.”

“No way.”

“It’s true. When you go back, all your luggage will be there.”

“Really, huh?”

I nodded without saying anything. Then, I realized it was not the time for this and somewhat hesitantly stood up.

“I’ll go call the doctor.”

It became evening. In the meantime, the doctor had come in and out several times, and there was a teacher who ran in after receiving a call.

“Yoon Hamin!”

At the text that the teacher was coming, I welcomed Lucia, who had been waiting outside the hospital room.

“Is what Yoon Hamin said true?”

“Yes, but it seems it would be difficult for her to attend the academy yet.”

I intended to relay the doctor’s words exactly, but as if it were unnecessary, the doctor approached with a file and met Lucia.

“Oh, are you the guardian?”

“Yes, I’m Lucia.”

“I see. Then did you roughly understand the situation?”

“Ah, no. I was just told that Kanna had woken up…”

After grasping what was going on, the doctor began listing Kanna’s condition to the homeroom teacher.

“The problem from the beginning was that we didn’t know how she got hurt, which made treatment difficult. We could not determine what kind of shock she had experienced or which areas were damaged. However, after

seeing her awake today and comparing it with what the student here said, it seems there is some memory loss. There also seems to be some mental regression.”

“…What?”

When I first heard it from the doctor, it felt incredibly despairing.

Yet the fact that I could do nothing only weighed heavily on my shoulders, making me feel miserable and powerless.

The teacher seemed to be in shock upon hearing those words, as she listened to the doctor blankly without any particular reaction.

“It’s not uncommon to temporarily lose memory due to a physical shock to the brain, but we will need ongoing observation to determine whether this is temporary or permanent. And this mental regression… It seems to be a psychological issue; this incident was likely just a trigger. Of course, since no proper examination has been performed, this is all hypothetical.”

I had firmly believed that she could recover, yet I was only frustrated by the realization that this might not be the case.

It was completely despairing that I would have to leave the hospital without receiving proper treatment. The only fortunate thing was that Kanna had regained consciousness and opened her eyes; however, once she became aware, another problem confronted me.

“We’ll need to meet once and decide on her discharge. Even if it takes a long time, in her current state, there are no examinations or treatments the hospital can provide, and she will have to stay in bed just to monitor her condition.”

“I, I’ll take a look first.”

The teacher displayed a perplexed expression, then soon steeled herself and turned around to leave.

In truth, I did not want to show her. Kanna seemed somewhat off, so I did not want to show her to anyone.

But it was not something I could refuse, so I took a deep breath to suppress my burning heart and followed her.

Creak, on the other side of the opening door was Kanna, who had been awake for quite a while.

“Teacher!”

Her bright voice made it hard to believe she was a patient in a hospital, and I felt my insides burning.

Every time I saw that bright demeanor, it felt like she was saying, ‘I was happy only until I entered the academy.’

“But why are you here, Teacher?”

“Kanna, I’m here as your guardian. They said it was necessary for the admission process.”

“Is that so? Thank you!”

Kanna bowed her head and greeted her politely.

The ongoing stress had accumulated and undoubtedly had altered her mind because of this incident.

Could it be because of the atmosphere of the academy? Was it mixed with stress regarding monsters? Or was it because she had been torn apart by so-called heroes?

From my perspective, I could not fully understand the stress that Kanna was carrying. I was only able to observe from a distance and somewhat understand, thinking, “Ah, I see.”

The pain I felt was merely a product of empathy and could not approach genuine stress. All I could feel was the overwhelming sadness.

“Kanna, is there any place you’re uncomfortable?”

“Me? I’m okay!”

“Was there anything hard for you?”

“It doesn’t seem like it. By the way, when can I leave the hospital? It’s too stuffy here.”

“Yes, yes. If there are no aftereffects, I will take care of the discharge procedures.”

The teacher looked conflicted, but she realized that she had no answer and responded to Kanna’s words.

“I’m sorry for bothering you.”

“It’s okay. I heard that Kanna did really well this time. Other heroes said so too.”

“Who? Me? No way, how could I do that? You must be confusing me with someone else.”

Kanna brushed it off with a face that was all jokes.

Silence lingered in the hospital room for a moment.

Seeing, understanding, and having given up first, I could not even begin to guess the immense wounds in her heart.

I was even afraid to say, “I will hurt in your place.”

But if we had to feel this pain, I wanted to take on that pain for her.

Swallowing my rising emotions silently, the teacher extended a helping hand, perhaps out of concern for Kanna.

“I know Kanna doesn’t have a guardian, but would you like to stay at my house? Just for a while. If you get sick, it’s good to have a guardian nearby since you’ll have to come to the hospital right away.”

Hearing this, Kanna tilted her head.

“I’m okay! Yoon Hamin asked me to live together.”

Upon that shocking statement, Lucia swiftly turned her head. Her gaze seemed to demand an immediate explanation for what she had just heard.

“…Um, well, you see…”

Since I was staying with Kanna, I had said something along the lines of, “Let’s keep doing this. I’ll help if it’s hard,” but I never anticipated it would become a bombshell in front of the teacher, so I broke into a cold sweat.

Ch. 92 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 92

“Yoon Hamin, please say something.”

The teacher’s voice felt sharp and piercing.

The doctor, perhaps feeling awkward, was frozen in place, not knowing whether to leave or stay, glancing nervously at the teacher.

I hesitated, trying to bring up my original relationship with Kanna.

But there was no need for that, as Kanna shouted out.

“I’m fine!”

“Kanna, that’s not the issue. Doing that in front of the teacher…”

“…….”

In an instant, Kanna’s expression darkened.

This caused the teacher to trail off, seemingly trying to approach the situation differently and soothingly.

“Kanna? It’s not that, but it’s a little problematic for a student to be so close without a guardian. It might be alright in a place where I can’t see, but when I’m watching like this, I have no choice but to intervene.”

“Then can’t you just pretend you didn’t see?”

Kanna was unexpectedly cheerful. Like a whining child, she seemed to wish for everything to align perfectly with her desires.

But it was absurd that after saying just a while ago that we weren't friends, she was now wildly acting out in front of the teacher after a few conversations.

The more Kanna acted like this, the more troublesome it became for me.

"Kanna, I've already seen and heard things…"

"Teacher."

I called out firmly.

The teacher, unsure how to comfort or pacify Kanna, turned slightly at my call.

"Yes?"

"In fact, Kanna and I are living together… Uh, I think it ended up like this because I was trying not to be discovered… I'm sorry."

"Excuse me?"

Her voice was filled with incredulity.

Honestly, I knew too. Which teacher would be prepared for a student suddenly saying they live together?

It was obvious what would happen afterward, so naturally, no student would do such a thing.

But Kanna wasn't in a normal state right now, and she exploded with that fact.

In fact, she was embracing pain, making it difficult for those around her.

It seemed that the end point of her physical and mental distress was here.

“…and Kanna’s luggage is there too.”

“But, this is…”

“I didn’t do what you were worried about. I won’t. Kanna asked me for help because she was in a tough spot, and I just let her use my room.”

The reason I was desperately explaining was to take Kanna with me.

Surely, leaving her with the teacher might provide better care.

But teachers, in the end, are people who follow orders from the higher-ups of the Hero Association.

I would rather protect Kanna even if it meant being expelled from the Hero Association.

So, I thought it was right for me, whose priority was Kanna, to take her with me.

“I don’t want to leave a student in the care of another student.”

“I like Hamin.”

“Kanna, this isn’t a matter for you to decide.”

The teacher shot back sharply.

And Kanna’s voice intervening indicated she was stubborn about this.

With Kanna lying on the bed and me standing tall behind the teacher, it seemed that we both wanted her to figure out what to do, making her even more troubled.

Just as silence settled for a moment, the doctor, who had almost been forgotten, carefully spoke up.

“If you’ve been together this long, I don’t think it’s a bad idea to continue living together. It’s also important to repeatedly stimulate the memories you’ve experienced before to recover from memory loss.”

That statement was a decisive blow.

The teacher insisted on checking the location of my house just once before following us, and after confirming that Kanna had a carrier, nodded.

Only then did it seem she accepted that Kanna had been living with me since before she was hospitalized.

Indeed, if I suddenly lured Kanna into my home, it would pose its own set of problems.

With a bitter smile, I let Kanna inside.

Thanks to the teacher, I was fortunate to be able to handle the entire admission and discharge process.

Kanna’s condition was not fortunate at all, but still, it was significant that she was alive for now.

Yes, compared to spending each day uncertain of when she might wake up, it would be better to wake up first and quickly identify what the problem was and focus on treatment.

If we could repeatedly show her the experiences she had to recover from memory loss, and if she could stimulate and recover the lost memories, that would be wonderful.

We couldn’t allow this situation to continue.

“Kanna, since you’re back, do you want to wash up first? You also need to change out of those clothes you just randomly picked.”

“Uh, I want to wash up! My hair is a mess!”

“Alright, alright…”

I said that and felt relieved on one hand.

If she had looked like this without her limbs—no, if at the very end her limbs had not grown back, I would have worried she would be tormented.

“I need to wash up~”

“Kanna, come here.”

“Yes?”

“This is your room… and your carrier is here.”

I brought Kanna to the room I had shown her before.

I pointed out where her carrier was, then took her to the dressing room to show her the location of the washing machine and laundry basket.

“Wow, is this really mine…?”

Kanna exclaimed in awe as she opened her carrier, and for some reason, it seemed that even that was something new to her, which stirred a strange feeling within me.

But it made sense; it was her own carrier, yet without any memories, her reaction was understandable, and I felt sorry for her.

But we needed to make her better quickly.

No, before that, I hoped she’d rely on me.

Kanna had been feeling increasingly isolated.

Overwhelmed by fear, she had come into my home, and due to her inability to sleep alone in the dark, she also had to sleep with me.

But that was all dependency, nothing more.

It meant I couldn’t alleviate her mental burdens.

“…Would you like to wash up first?”

“Yeah! I’ll go wash up first!”

Kanna smiled brightly and grabbed the clothes she was going to change into.

She entered the bathroom, and I stared quietly at the closed door.

A nagging fear lingered that one day if things really became problematic, she might choose d*ath alone. After all, she had previously thought that if the fear of monsters became too much, it might be better to d*e.

Perhaps if the Hero Association’s higher-ups decided to make some strange verdict and exclude Kanna, she might choose a more peaceful d*ath beforehand.

I wanted to prevent such a thing from happening, but truthfully, it felt impossible for me right now.

Left alone for a moment, I sat on the living room sofa with my hands clasped.

I tried to slowly gather my strength, but unlike usual, it felt like something was blocking me, and my expression wrinkled in frustration.

The flickering light, blinking as if it might turn on, eventually went out.

Usually, it would have shone brightly, but the output that wasn’t working as I had thought was vexing.

At this rate, it was certain that I couldn’t protect Kanna, much less engage in proper activities.

If I pushed myself to the limit, I might retain my position as the top student, but as soon as I started getting active, my deficiencies would soon become apparent, and it felt hopeless.

What was I supposed to do about the monster that had gestured as if to eat something at the end? The realization that if that monster didn't show up again, I wouldn't be able to do anything tormented me.

Ironically, the thought that I might need that monster to appear again felt ridiculous.

Thoughts about Kanna were scattered everywhere. It seemed it would take time to organize all of this.

As for my abilities, it felt like they would continue indefinitely without assurance. As long as that monster didn't reveal itself, I was likely to remain in this state.

"…Hamin! I'm all done washing up!"

Had I been lost in thought for too long? Kanna had finished her shower and come out.

Watching her vigorously towel dry her hair and hum a tune made me feel constrained.

"Kanna! You need to dry it properly!"

"Huh? It's fine, it's fine. I can just dry it with the towel."

"No, come here."

I quickly stood up and took Kanna back to the dressing room.

"It's alright…"

"Look in the mirror. If your hair isn't dried properly, it won't be good."

“Then it can’t be bad?”

“Which is why you need to dry it.”

I brushed Kanna’s ivory hair with the hairdryer.

For some reason, emotions swelled up in me, and I struggled to repress the tears forming in my eyes.

“Why are you crying?”

At those words, I looked up, and my distorted expression reflected back at me in the mirror.

Kanna was worried about me.

Why, why…

Seeing Kanna worry about me made my eyes well up with tears.

What should be a concern right now isn’t me, but Kanna herself.

She should be thinking of her own body, yet it’s painful that she’s worried about me.

I blinked.

“I’m not crying…”

I wanted to insist that I wasn’t crying, but looking in the mirror, I indeed was, so I couldn’t continue speaking.

Kanna, responding to my feeble denial, leaned in and whispered.

“I wish you would smile.”

Ah.

Suddenly recalling that day, I felt a lump in my throat.

The voice I had once heard.

But right now, from Kanna’s perspective, it would have to be before she saw me; in her memories, she must have just met me.

Come to think of it, she had also spoken as if she knew me in the hospital.

“…Why?”

I asked unconsciously.

I felt like Kanna would surely tell me the reason now.

Why does she want me to smile? The person who needs happiness more than I do is her, so why is she saying such things?

“When Hamin cries, it makes my heart hurt.”

Yet Kanna didn’t reveal anything.

With a lump in my throat, I merely nodded.

“I’m sorry.”

“Hey, you smiled!”

As I forced a bitter smile, Kanna seemed to like it and lifted her head to look at my face in the mirror.

Looking down at her face as she smiled with her heart, I felt like my heart was breaking.

Ch. 93 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 93

“Delicious.”

Kanna, giggling softly, shook her legs like a child, smiling innocently.

As she stretched her legs and shook them repeatedly, she lightly tapped my knee, which was sitting across from her. Each time she did, Kanna would glance at me with an “Oops,” but I just smiled back at her.

I hoped she wouldn’t feel the need to apologize for such things. At the very least, I wanted this place to be a comfortable space for her.

There was no way to avoid problems if she went to the academy before regaining her memory.

The reason Kanna was treated as last place and ridiculed might be because she seemed to merely want to live a comfortable life with the title of a hero. The fact that she was disregarded by the upper-tier students was likely the main reason.

Most people probably thought they would never cross paths with her, both within the academy and outside in society.

Among the lower-tier students, there were instances of mutual control or even pushing each other down to avoid falling to the bottom. They likely deducted points in the interpersonal training to rise even one rank.

In that atmosphere, Kanna ended up in last place quite noticeably.

Neither her physical abilities nor her personal awakening abilities, nor her knowledge of magic were enough; she became an easy target, needing only the label of “hero.”

But what about now?

Now, some students must have seen Kanna fighting like a true hero. Her blue tie signified she was a first-year, and her ivory hair and purple eyes would have clearly identified her as Kanna Aurora.

If she were to go to the academy now, good reputations would surely circulate. It wouldn’t surprise me if stories got around behind my back.

However, conversely, what I worried about was the commotion that took place in front of the academy that day.

The moment Kanna lost her limbs left a deep impression in the minds of the other academy students. If they interpreted that in their own way, they might label her as “Kanna, the betrayer of humanity.”

The truth didn’t matter. Only what aligned with their preferences would be adopted as the truth.

Cleaning a tarnished reputation required time and mental effort, making it a reality that only the parties involved would end up suffering.

“Did you finish eating?”

“Yeah. It was delicious. Hamin really cooks well.”

“Really?”

“I knew you were a good cook!”

…Is she remembering? If she vaguely recalls the food I made for her, that would be great.

Yet, I knew I shouldn’t push her to remember for no reason, so I quietly watched her and then rose from my chair.

As I was about to clear the empty bowl, Kanna stood up with me and picked up her own bowl.

“Whoa, you don’t have to. Go rest on the sofa over there.”

“No, I’m not really that sick.”

Kanna said this and quickly placed her bowl in the sink and washed her hands.

Watching Kanna, I often felt a sense of relief.

Maybe it’s a relief that we avoided the worst. At least, the fact that recovery is possible is a positive sign.

It was the same this time. If she had complete memory loss, it would have been much more distressing, and even if dissociative identity disorder arose, it would have been hard to discern who the real Kanna was; I found myself repeatedly feeling grateful that we avoided such scenarios.

I spent some time sitting in front of the TV.

I watched an entertainment program once and checked the news for updates.

Beyond the collapsed wall from earlier, three monsters appeared. Everyone knew that their power exceeded what had been shown until now.

However, in comparison, casualties were only reported on the hero side, while civilians managed to evacuate quickly.

It was unfortunate to know that some heroes had fallen in the line of duty, but at least it felt like the situation was becoming more manageable. This too, might have been a result of Kanna’s efforts.

The lives of those twenty heroes were saved and brought here thanks to her.

Beneath the darkened night sky, something began to roar.

“Is it raining?”

That’s strange. I didn’t hear any news about rain. I shrugged it off, thinking that it was only said to be around 30%, but it seems like exactly 30% fell. I stood up briefly, pulled back the curtain, and looked outside; the thicker raindrops were tapping on my small yard even through the glass.

“Kanna, it looks like it’s raining.”

“…Yeah.”

Kanna seemed indifferent to the weather, staring dazedly at the TV screen. It didn’t seem odd that she would be curious about the TV, but oh, did she mention that she didn’t have a TV at home?

Regardless, the content coming from the news was undoubtedly something worth focusing on.

Things about heroes and the fallen barriers.

Even if Kanna had no memory, it seemed her interests hadn’t changed, even if her mind had regressed slightly.

[At that time, heroes facing the monsters simultaneously lost consciousness. According to the surrounding heroes’ testimonies, there was a fierce explosion of unrefined magical power.]

Stories about the people Kanna saved that she couldn’t remember were being broadcasted.

[…Three days later, heroes are reportedly starting to regain consciousness from being unconscious. Let’s listen to an interview with Hero Tawar.]

The screen changed.

The studio transitioned to a hospital, where a hero named Tawar began conversing with a reporter. After a brief introduction of the reporter and the

hero, the part of the conversation I was curious about followed.

[You lost consciousness for three days due to a fierce battle with the monsters. Do you recall anything from that time?]

[It’s a bit hazy, but there were about twenty heroes, including myself, who were coordinating efforts.]

[Twenty heroes? The monsters must have been incredibly strong.]

[Yes, just before I lost consciousness, someone ran toward me and used their ability to create something. Upon reflection, I think it might have been a barrier created by their ability. I believe it helped me survive.]

I felt relieved. It was an opportunity to firmly state that Kanna was not like those monsters.

I sat Cross-legged on the sofa, lost in thought while watching the TV.

Even if they were the top brass of the Hero Association, there would be issues in recklessly dealing with Kanna, who risked her life fighting monsters and nearly died to protect the heroes.

Tawar, Tawar. I remembered that name. I might not know all the names of the heroes who had lost consciousness, but I needed to remember the name of the interviewed hero for future reference.

[…I can’t recall which hero it was, but if they regain consciousness like I did, I would like to express my gratitude to them.]

Kanna was just staring blankly at the screen, showing no sense of emotion.

If that was her achievement, and the one who survived was feeling gratitude for it, it would be overwhelming.

I wanted to tell her, “What you did,” but I shook my head. Right now, Kanna’s treatment was my priority.

There was no need to force her to remember things that didn’t exist. My task was simply to allow her the space to recall them slowly on her own.

“Kanna, shall we go to bed? It seems late.”

“Yeah, I’ll sleep. Where should I sleep?”

Indeed, where should she sleep?

Since she currently has no memories, she wouldn’t have any traumas. She probably wouldn’t feel fear from being left alone in the dark.

If that’s the case, then it’s time to use the room we haven’t used yet. But to stimulate her memory, wouldn’t it be necessary to repeat the things we’ve done before? Should I really avoid that?

The very thought of having a sleeping space made me feel guilty.

“…Ah, you know the room where the suitcase was? That’s Kanna’s room.”

“Really? Okay, got it.”

“The blankets are over there…”

“Thank you.”

Kanna said this, and then turned off the TV with the remote control next to her.

The living room went silent instantly, and I moved to my room while Kanna went into hers.

Honestly, I felt a bit empty.

At first, it felt like I was going crazy, but now it had become almost a daily routine to sleep next to Kanna.

It would be a lie to say I didn’t have any impure thoughts, but still, seeing her rely on me due to her fear made me want to meet her expectations.

This was already the third time. I lay on the bed alone, staring at the ceiling.

I would rather lie on a hospital bed, knowing Kanna was next to me and healthy. Being without her right now, not seeing her at this moment was just frustrating.

Even so, it might just be excessive worry.

“……”

What should I do for Kanna to return to her original self?

Could it be that regaining her memory would be more distressing? Would it be better to let Kanna escape from her painful memories as things are? But isn’t that wrong?

I couldn’t fathom what the option Kanna would desire the most could possibly be.

Regaining her memory could mean completeness, but it also meant facing her pain, trauma, and unfortunate circumstances directly.

However, turning away from all realities wouldn’t solve everything.

The worries were mounting.

Feeling too suffocated, I covered my closed eyes with my hands.

In that moment, I felt a strange illusion, as if the darkened space had brightened for an instant.

“?”

In confusion, I dropped my hands and looked out the window. Beyond the pouring rain, the flash I saw earlier wasn’t an illusion as thunder rumbled, echoing through the air.

This rain seemed like it would last quite a while.

And then—

Knock, knock, two soft knocks made me sit up straight.

“Kanna?”

The moment I opened the door, I saw Kanna’s purple eyes trembling beyond the dark space. She was shivering, clutching a pillow, pointing to her room.

“I… I’m scared… can I sleep with you?”

“Uh, uh…?”

“I… I don’t know, I’m just scared…”

Ah, I see.

Even if she lost her memories, it wasn’t a complete erasure—there was still the hope that she would return someday. Kanna was trembling from a trauma she didn’t even know she had.

“Yeah, come in.”

“Sorry…”

“It’s okay.”

Kanna, expressing the relief of being alive, hurried into the room.

She hesitated for a moment, checking my reaction before cautiously taking the space next to me. It took a little time, but she seemed more stable than before.

“…Good night.”

“Uh, um, good night, Hamin.”

I hope she has sweet dreams.

Ch. 94 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 94

The rain poured down. Occasionally, lightning struck.

It felt like Kanna’s lightning ability. There was no purplish hue, though.

No, perhaps Kanna’s ability resembles a magnetic field. It was said that she previously set up a veil to prevent the explosion of her ability.

While clear days are nice, rainy days also had their charms.

The soft sounds of rain falling, the scent rising from the wet earth.

Those things calmed the mind and body.

If it had just rained quietly, it might have turned out to be a comfortable night.

However, I was finding it hard to sleep due to the sound of thunder.

I can sleep even if I hear that sound, but it seems Kanna beside me couldn’t.

“…Ugh, ugh…”

“Are you okay? Are you scared of the thunder…?”

Looking at Kanna, who curled up and grabbed the hem of my clothes, I wasn’t sure how to respond.

So I tried cautiously speaking to her to find the cause.

But a voice came as if to warn me not to treat her like a fool.

“W-who are you calling a coward? There’s no way I would be scared of that!”

“Well, that’s true…”

Before, she was only afraid of being alone in dark places, so just being with her could alleviate her worries to some extent.

But now it seemed like being together didn’t properly resolve her fears, which was quite puzzling for me.

I couldn’t remember anything, and my mind was dulled to the extent that I couldn’t talk about the situation properly, so I decided to change the direction of the conversation.

“Would it help if we talked about something?”

“Something to talk about…?”

“Just any story you know.”

Any story would do; I thought it would be better to chat like this until she got tired and fell asleep.

Looking at the rain, it seemed like it would continue until morning, so waiting for the rain to stop seemed better than that.

As I spoke this way, Kanna seemed to ponder seriously for a moment and then brightened up as if she had thought of something.

“Ah!”

“Since it’s tough, we should definitely lie down and talk.”

“Ah, okay.”

“So? Did you think of a good story?”

It felt a bit like I was dealing with a child.

She wasn’t really a little kid, but her bright expression made me feel bittersweet.

I thought perhaps if I fixed my posture and only exchanged voices while keeping my head fixed to the ceiling, it wouldn’t be so overwhelming.

Kanna, who had been fidgeting, straightened her back and pulled her hands out from under the blanket.

Then she continued speaking.

“Do you know?”

“What?”

“They say there’s a totem here.”

“…….”

“If we have that, that means monsters can’t just come barging in, so let’s go get rid of it tomorrow.”

Hearing Kanna’s words, I couldn’t say anything.

Before we became friends at the academy, I had no one to believe in, so I had desperately asked, clutching at straws, but now, as friends, that information felt much more certain.

If I had been her friend from the beginning, if I had reached out my hand when others turned their backs, would she have told me everything she knew?

Before regretting such things, all events had already flown past; however, listening to this kind of story made me want to look back at those bygone times.

As I sat there dazed, Kanna seemed to feel that her explanation was lacking and hurriedly added more.

“Really! I’ll definitely show you if I find it later. But we have to get rid of it quickly. What if monsters come barging in again, like in the news? To my knowledge, it seems to be a village near the barrier… Wow, could it be that place?”

“No.”

“Huh?”

“Kanna, you’ve already protected it once. We don’t need to look for a totem.”

I whispered those words.

Feeling a slight sting in my eyes, I secretly wiped them away with my hand.

In response to my voice, she stammered as if she couldn’t believe it.

But there was nothing false in what I said, so I continued to speak to her.

If I didn’t say such things, Kanna might rush out wearing shoes, eager to find the totem tomorrow.

“It’s May now, right?”

“…Yeah.”

“In those two and a half months, you’ve worked hard to achieve this.”

Although many people have died, I could say that she had saved more lives because of it.

In this situation, I refrained from speaking about d*ath, hoping Kanna would only hear the good things.

Since one day, when things returned to normal, we would face those realities, there was no need to burden her with pain as it was.

Yet even after hearing that, Kanna swiftly grasped what she had done, turning her head sharply.

I could tell from the sound and her feelings, so I turned my head toward Kanna as well.

“I did it? I already did…?”

With wide eyes, Kanna had a look of disbelief.

“W-was it different from what I knew…? It was strange. There’s no way monsters would just barge in… I must have done something wrong.”

Tears welled up in Kanna’s eyes.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry… Is it because of me that this happened?”

Come to think of it, even without me saying anything, the news had already listed the names of those who died.

Recognizing that someone had died after seeing it was only natural, yet my effort to ignore that truth was in vain.

“…….”

She was blaming herself for trying to erase the totem, and that this incident had occurred because she had already done so.

After all, recalling her words, it was clear that someday the monsters would come here.

So, those totems must have existed.

Kanna had only accelerated that timing, and people merely disapproved of the speed of that change.

That was all.

If it means that it can be resolved quickly, then accelerating it is the right choice. Yet whether it could actually be resolved quickly is a different matter.

Kanna was worrying, fearing, and regretting that she had caused this outcome.

I thought this might have been something Kanna experienced even before losing her memory.

But until she made that choice, she must have faced a lot of deliberation and hesitation, and despite that, she chose, so her resolve must have supported her.

Now, without such resolve, Kanna was just suffering.

“No, thanks to that, people are still being vigilant. That’s why there have been fewer sacrifices…”

“…….”

To comfort Kanna, I voiced the present situation.

Although the wall had crumbled because of Kanna’s actions, it made the heroes more aware of the existence of monsters and strengthened their defenses.

That sacrifice was not trivial, but it had led to achievements enough to offset it.

Informing people about the weaknesses of new monsters and enabling them to handle it wasn’t an easy task.

It surely required a significant sacrifice.

Even as a student, Kanna had faced monsters and fought while being looked down upon and laughed at by others for being last. She even protected heroes who were not immune to unrefined magical power.

With that alone, Kanna definitely had enough qualifications to be called a hero.

No, more than enough.

“Do you know? That interview from the news earlier, that was about you.”

“Huh…?”

“It’s because you protected other heroes from the monsters. So I think you did well.”

I smiled. I thought her actions deserved praise, they were worthy of acclaim.

Kanna hesitated for a moment, but though it was hard to accept, she nodded a few times as if to say she believed me.

“…Since Hamin said that, I’ll believe it.”

Hearing Kanna’s words made the corners of my lips twitch.

I hoped she would believe that I believed in her, and receiving that response brought me a rush of emotion.

Of course, I didn’t know how the original Kanna was, but I also wondered if she acted that way because she believed in me.

“Hamin, Hamin.”

“Yeah?”

Kanna, who seemed like she might fall asleep quietly, called my name again.

There was something cute about her repeatedly calling for me, so I instinctively looked in her direction.

Kanna, who slightly turned her head to look at me, caught my attention.

I wanted to know what else she would say, so I listened closely to her words.

If she repeated what she had already said, I would listen again, and if she sounded worried and regretful, I would comfort her; that was my intention.

“If it rains, your powers won’t work well, right?”

“Yeah,”

As the cloudy weather obscured the stars.

There was no need to ask how she knew. I already understood that she knew things about me.

Of course, I was curious about the source of that knowledge, but Kanna didn’t seem like she would share that.

No, maybe she would tell me now.

Or perhaps that too was instinct, or maybe she had forgotten along with her memories.

As I was lost in such serious thoughts, Kanna, in a different tone than earlier, spoke with a slight seriousness.

As if giving me advice.

“Then try to work on using your powers even on rainy days. There will surely be good things.”

“…It would be nice to use them anytime.”

“Right?”

“I’ll give it a try.”

Kanna raised the corners of her lips and smiled mischievously.

Would something happen on rainy days? If it was a warning, was it related to becoming a star?

If I were to say it plainly, people might view it strangely, so maybe she was taking care to phrase it differently. If so, it wouldn’t be surprising to think there’s some connection after all.

If something were to happen on a cloudy day that could make things difficult for me, it would likely mean to train myself to become a being like a star, free from restrictions on power usage.

I didn’t expect to fully understand Kanna’s thoughts now, nor those of the pre-memory loss Kanna.

It would be hard to follow her logic derived over those two months with just a brief thought before going to sleep.

The conversation continued to flow gradually.

When I realized I was starting to feel sleepy, Kanna softly said.

“If Hamin cries, it’s probably my fault…?”

“Why would it be your fault?”

I startled, sitting up briskly at her words, but Kanna was still sleeping lightly.

Was that said in her sleep, or had she already fallen asleep and was just mumbling?

What was certain was that she was harboring a sense of guilt toward me.

There was no reason for that, yet.

Ch. 95 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 95

The Lamiris Family was a clan that managed the barriers, leading a total of 17 families.

A legacy and abilities handed down through generations. Although it was heavy to bear on my shoulders, the reason for carrying that weight and stepping forward was due to a sense of duty.

Even though the work was funded by taxes, the people felt proud of the taxes used here and were fortunate to feel that way, which allowed them to stand tall.

Even a hero cannot act without money. However, if that is combined with a sense of duty and fulfillment, then it could create a better environment for the people.

If one was simply satisfied with the money received, they would not be a hero but merely a vigilante.

I worked hard to inherit the family business and to become a true hero.

Academy and family business. I desperately tried not to neglect either.

I put in the effort. And that would be rewarded with results. If the results did not manifest properly, it meant the effort was insufficient. Therefore, I needed to work even harder.

The idea that there is not enough time to put in effort was all a lie. Reducing sleep time and cutting back on leisure time naturally creates more time.

Not everyone has the mindset that they must do this, but at least if I am in a position to protect someone, I thought this level of commitment was only natural.

If I lacked sufficient studies to properly understand the barriers, and if I lacked the ability to erect the barriers properly, how many people would suffer because of me, unable to sleep peacefully at night, or how many would grow in number unable to roam freely during the day.

It is a sense of duty. It is a responsibility. Taking responsibility for that position was not a difficult task at all. I gave my all so that my weak younger brother wouldn't have to bear the burden of continuing the family business.

A person can survive by sleeping just about four hours. I didn't need to waste time on leisure. In fact, there was no time to invest in entertainment.

Perhaps because of that compulsion, I liked Yoon Hamin, who was good at everything. I felt like such a person could inspire me to dream of my ideals.

Results were the answers to efforts.

I wondered how much effort had been put into the unseen places. It made me think.

But such thoughts shattered not long after. It wasn't because I saw Yoon Hamin slacking off or anything like that. It was simply because there were beings who couldn't produce results despite their efforts.

Kanna. She had never escaped last place, but that was simply due to a lack of talent. To cover for her inadequate talent, she nearly managed to mask a practical exam score of zero with a written test score.

Even if she received a score of zero in the practical exam and managed to escape last place in the written exam, the next person who was to take last place would surely receive strange glances.

However, such evaluations were not worth much. If one puts in that level of effort, it speaks to the fact that they didn’t just enter the Academy because it was a cushy job.

However, Kanna’s problem did not lie there.

It was that she was entangled with the monsters.

In such cases, objective judgment was nearly impossible. The information already given stated that Kanna was involved with the monsters and that the barriers had collapsed because of that.

In front of other heroes, an hero named Asrad spoke like that, and Kanna nodded without denial. In the end, didn’t she absorb a totem of the monster into her body?

As the eldest daughter of the family that guards the barriers, it was difficult to accept. After keeping her distance like that, Kanna eventually returned, took the exam, and even participated in a recent battle against the monsters.

“…Was it a misunderstanding?”

Was it just a rumor, and did I hastily make a judgment based on it? If that were the case, I felt I would truly have no face to meet Kanna.

Kanna didn’t deny that the barriers had collapsed because of her, but was that not due to her own volition but merely because she couldn’t deny it? Therefore, perhaps Kanna fought the monsters alongside the heroes to make up for it.

It was a moment filled with all sorts of distracting thoughts.

I needed to focus on studying, but I felt like I was going crazy because I couldn’t concentrate.

Of course, there wasn’t much information given to me, so I couldn’t make a hasty judgment. However, the voices around me inevitably led me to think in that direction.

As my father and grandfather had said, Kanna was indeed an entity that aroused unease within the barriers. Even if Kanna didn’t wish for it, as long as she existed and acknowledged it, if the barriers were to collapse, wouldn’t that be the source of unease?

Even if one risks their lives fighting the monsters like this, is it really the right thing to drive out someone whose very existence is a threat?

It was a moment of many thoughts. Ultimately, putting aside both studies and the family business, I took out my device.

It was Sunday, and I should be able to meet tomorrow, but I felt it would still be difficult to pull it out within the Academy, so I cautiously made the call.

“…Yes, Yoon Hamin. Are you at the hospital right now?”

[No, I’m home now.]

“I thought you’d be at the hospital taking care of Kanna.”

[Ah… Since she’s been discharged, I don’t need to go anymore.]

“Is that so? Then, can I ask just one thing?”

I had expected him to be at the hospital taking care of Kanna, so hearing he was at home gave me a sense of relief. If he was home, he could speak comfortably.

[Uh, um, what’s the matter?]

“It’s nothing special. Yoon Hamin, you’re close to Kanna, right? Can I ask how you feel about Kanna?”

[Huh? Wait a second.]

Yoon Hamin went silent for a moment, as if he was doing something, before continuing to speak.

[Uh, what kind of question is that? How do you think?]

“There’s quite a bit of talk, you know. About being dragged away, being a threat to humanity and so on, right? Do you think she’s a harmful presence that brings down the barriers, or do you think she’s still someone worth protecting?”

Silence fell. It was such a chilling silence that it made me feel as if he would have had a seriously distorted expression if we were facing each other.

[…If you’re going to throw someone away just because they’re harmful to the barriers despite fighting so hard against them, wouldn’t that be more problematic? So you’re asking if I still think she’s worth protecting? Then that’s even more reason to protect her. If monsters are trying to k*ll her that desperately, it’s only right to protect her even more. Isn’t it annoying?]

Yoon Hamin desperately defended Kanna.

However, unlike what my father and grandfather said, it was quite a valid argument.

Her existence breaks down the barriers. Therefore, she must be driven out. That was one voice. The very fact that monsters were willing to take risks to come over the barriers and try to k*ll her made her worth protecting. That was another voice.

Both sides had their reasons.

There is no right or wrong. If I wanted to find which side sounded more convincing, the only way would be to calculate whether Kanna, in that way, was worth protecting.

But I felt like I knew.

If peace is found that way, and truly no more monsters come afterwards, could I genuinely be happy about that?

A peace gained by casting someone aside. There may well be eyes that question whether it would be right to drive out someone who would tip the balance against lives that would otherwise be lost if peace is not pursued.

After all, either a complete stranger or an acquaintance would surely refer to someone they hold dear.

However, viewing it objectively from the perspective of a ‘hero,’ one cannot measure the value of lives.

Whether male or female, elderly or child; they are all beings with equal opportunities to live. If so, in the end, there was nothing to do but count.

Is that really the right thing?

Thousands of people who sadly d*e. One person who can be extracted and sacrificed.

Which side weighs more?

“Is that so?”

I couldn’t make that choice.

The name of my profession is hero, and people merely praise accordingly. It seemed to indicate that I could not become a true hero.

Isn’t hesitating over such things itself a disqualification from being a hero? Perhaps it’s more suited to me to inherit the family business and protect and supplement the barriers.

It’s easy to distinguish good from evil, justice from injustice, but properly judging what is right is challenging enough to make one sigh.

What is heavy? What is more precious?

I would mourn the thousands who died caught up in disasters without a choice; but is it really right to drive out someone pushed toward sacrificial suffering by countless others?

“I understand. I’m sorry for asking such a pointless question. I was just curious since there are so many stories in our family.”

[…I got carried away without realizing it. I’m really sorry.]

Yoon Hamin said that and awkwardly apologized.

“Lastly… I have one more question.”

[What is it?]

“If Kanna regains consciousness, could you perhaps ask her quietly?”

[Hmm, what should I ask her?]

I certainly thought her efforts were commendable. Thus, when I suggested we become friends, I nodded approvingly.

However, the moment I thought of her as the culprit behind the broken barriers, I took a step back.

Yet Kanna, without any grumblings or complaints, only focused on me, so what thoughts was she having? Would she hate me, resent me? Was she uncomfortable with me, who just ate next to Yoon Hamin without even having a conversation?

Even so, there was nothing I could do. I was the one who instigated it.

“…I want to apologize.”

One must take responsibility for what they instigate.

This is not about being a hero but about doing what is necessary as a person.

Rather than blindly following the family’s opinions as if they were my own, I wanted to follow the opinions my heart dictated.

Ch. 96 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 96

Receiving the call from Orca left me in an awkward situation. She said she wanted to apologize to Kanna, but the person who should be receiving that apology might not even understand why she needs to accept it.

Although Kanna was discharged, her condition had not completely recovered. It was likely that even if I talked about various things, she would have a confused expression, thinking, “Why does Orca want to apologize?”

Moreover, the fact that Kanna went home to my house instead of her own after being discharged was also a bit of a problem.

It seemed that Kanna couldn’t distinguish between what she needed to say and what she didn’t need to say, and if I let her meet Orca like this, it was obvious she would say that she was living with me.

In any case, it was a challenging situation.

I couldn’t send her to the Academy. It was impossible to convey Orca’s message as she wished. I couldn’t even allow them to meet face-to-face.

Sighing deeply, I stepped out of the room and glanced at Kanna, who was in the living room.

“What’s wrong?”

“Oh, it’s nothing.”

In this situation, if Kanna were to hear an apology, I thought she might hesitate for a moment but then finally think, “Sure!” and forgive her.

However, forgiving in such a way might not be something Kanna could accept before losing her memory, and it seemed that Orca wouldn’t want that kind of forgiveness either, so I kept silent.

I considered going outside, but seeing the rain continuing throughout the day, I quietly sat beside Kanna.

“Kanna.”

“Yeah?”

“…It’s nothing.”

“What is it, you’re being vague.”

It seemed Kanna didn’t like it when I kept trying to say something and then fell silent, so she turned her head sharply with a frown.

But even if she made that expression, there weren’t many things I could say.

Summarizing from last night’s conversation, Kanna had a clear goal even before coming to the Academy.

She already knew about the barriers and totems and was trying to resolve them. For some reason, she seemed to know about me and acted like she was willing to move for my sake.

Until earlier, or rather, until I heard the friend request in mid-March, I had been just an indifferent individual who had no interest.

The more I learned about her, the more my heart ached.

“If Hamin cries, it must be my fault…?”

What could possibly be your fault? I wouldn’t cry. And if you were here, I could smile.

Instead, I worried that it might be my fault if you cried. You were so dazzling that it would make me regret the time I spent ignoring someone

who was right beside me, treating them as if they didn’t exist at all.

Just as I had always raised my head to look at the stars in the sky, I felt that you were there among them.

Even though we were the same age, her earnest efforts to solve the problems she faced in her own situation felt like a star to me.

For just over two weeks, nearly three weeks. I realized that her usually bright personality was shifting back to the one I had first encountered in Kanna.

Tired from neglect and ridicule, Kanna was forced to compromise.

Realizing that she couldn’t rely on anyone or receive help from anyone, her words had all devolved into jokes, and she learned how to endure on her own first.

The thought that I had unknowingly participated in that was enough to furrow my brow. How terrible it was that the atmosphere of this Academy could twist a person’s character like this.

In an Academy that should be producing heroes, excessive competition and arbitrary judgments from others could ruin an individual.

That’s why I wanted to change it.

I might just be an ordinary student, but even if I’m the top student, I was just one of the first-year students. However, like Kanna did, I was determined to do my best within my capabilities.

Monday.

The time was mid-May.

Spring was slowly fading away, and summer seemed to fill that gap as it seeped in.

Still, the cool air brushed against my skin due to the rain over the weekend. I was worried I might have to take off my blazer soon, but today felt like I needed it.

After managing to get Kanna settled, I arrived at the Academy and surveyed the surroundings.

Throughout the day, I thought countless times about how to change the atmosphere of the Academy.

In fact, competition existed to promote each other to be good heroes, so it couldn't be abolished. Furthermore, making arbitrary judgments was merely a person's subjective perspective, so I couldn't criticize it.

No matter how eloquently one speaks, in the end, they can only express what they see based on their convictions and beliefs.

Even so, changing that was impossible. Ultimately, the only thing I could change was my surroundings. The environment and atmosphere that surround people.

What one person could do was limited, but if there were supporters, things could change quickly.

"Yoon Hamin, you've come in a bit late today?"

With her golden hair and blue eyes, she was a prime example, a top student often called the next head of the Lamiris family, Orca Lamiris.

"I had something to deal with."

As I answered with a bitter smile, she cautiously asked.

"…Um, did you pass on my message to Kanna? It seems she won't be showing up today either…"

"I'm sorry, I couldn't pass it on."

“Oh, I see… I suppose it would be awkward to contact someone who’s just been discharged.”

Orca nodded, seemingly disappointed but also accepting the situation. She seemed to be hoping for something in the future.

It felt like she regretted being awkward with me after hearing that Asrad, the hero, might be the cause of the barrier collapse.

I was curious about what kind of reaction Kanna would have when she heard this after regaining her senses. I hoped she would be happy.

Well, for now, I couldn’t convey it. So I decided to set that story aside and tackle the most important issue.

“By the way, Orca, I was thinking of trying something. Can you listen?”

“What is it?”

“I think it would be better to talk about it in the cafeteria later.”

“If that’s the case, why not just say it in the cafeteria instead of making me curious?”

“Sorry, sorry.”

I smiled bitterly.

After four classes, it was lunchtime.

With students from three grades gathering, even the spacious cafeteria felt overcrowded.

Since each class gets to use the space only once, it didn’t really need to be any bigger.

Anyway, I found myself having lunch alone with Orca and glanced around.

“So, what is it? You said you have something to talk about during lunchtime?”

Perhaps because she was anxious about what I said in the morning, Orca began to pressure me to speak.

“Oh, um, I was thinking about throwing the exam that’s next week.”

“…Throwing the exam?”

“Deliberately not receiving grades. If possible, I’d prefer to end up in last place.”

“Why would you want to do that? Regardless of the circumstances, in the end, what matters is the result.”

She surely knew that.

With such a competitive spirit and dedication to effort, it was something Orca would absolutely dislike. But I hadn’t come to the Academy with the intention of getting good grades to eventually join a wonderful agency and live peacefully with a monthly salary.

At worst, I wouldn’t mind not becoming a hero.

After all, isn’t it certain that others or future heroes would protect the world? If someone like me couldn’t make it, I could simply nod and go find my own way.

Even though I had come here wanting to be a hero for everyone, after realizing the existence of one person who could be cast aside even by those people and ultimately not protected, I thought it would be fine to become a hero just for that person.

“The atmosphere of the Academy feels too burdensome.”

I wanted to persuade Orca. But I couldn’t even start the conversation without saying that Kanna’s original personality had changed because of the

Academy’s atmosphere.

Hiding everything while hoping for help was indeed greedy. But could I say it?

That question crossed my mind, but in the end, I had no choice but to speak.

After all, it was something too burdensome to handle alone.

“Huh?”

I began to voice the truth, leaving behind Orca, who seemed not to understand my words. Until just yesterday, I had thought of keeping Kanna’s matters a secret for a while, but I reversed that thought.

“Actually, Kanna has been discharged, but her condition isn’t good.”

“…Not good?”

“It seems she has lost most of her memories from the Academy because of a severe head injury. And, how should I put it… Due to some brain damage, she’s regressed; it’s a bit… hard for her to communicate properly. I don’t know if it came out too dispersed or too coherent. Anyway, that happened…”

Somehow, as I mentioned Kanna’s situation, I found myself rambling. With a slight m*an, I checked Orca’s reactions, and she lost her focus on her meal and stared at me blankly.

“If that happened, why didn’t you let me know?”

“I thought you wanted to keep your distance from Kanna, so I couldn’t say anything.”

“…Oh.”

Orca seemed to reflect on her own actions with a sigh.

“Anyway, it seems her original personality before coming to the Academy was bright; she was truly like that.”

I unemotionally mentioned what I had seen.

“Bright, caring about others… Worrying… And watching that made me remember when she first asked to be friends with us in mid-March.”

My appetite vanished. I couldn’t eat anything.

So, relinquishing everything, I continued with my heavy heart.

“Back then, she definitely looked depressed. She must have struggled for two or three weeks at the Academy, right? It must have been hard because of being in last place. That’s why I wanted to change it.”

“……”

Orca remained silent.

Then,

“I… I’d like to see Kanna; is that not possible? Do you happen to know where she lives?”

The situation became a bit awkward.

Ch. 97 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 97

I want to change the academy. Achieving that wish was a lot to handle alone. Therefore, there had to be someone who could tell the truth and provide help.

Maybe Orca, who I had managed to befriend and talk to somewhat closely, would suffice.

Thus, I wanted to change the academy and thought about how to ask Orca, hoping to see her reaction.

Kanna was a bright-spirited person. Although after coming to the academy, all that brightness seemed to have died out.

The first impression of Kanna. When she first showed me a cheerful smile, despite only having seen her bitter smile before, it struck my heart.

So even if memories returned and I fell back into a depressive state, even if things became tough, I wanted to let her know there was surely a place she could return to.

Well, while it’s good to create an environment for Kanna to return to, wouldn’t she need to improve to see such an environment?

I figured I should either listen well to the doctor or try various things for how to treat her.

The problem was the things I needed to tell Orca.

I felt difficult about how to tell her to take Kanna home if she knew where Kanna lived, expressing that I wanted to see her just once.

Kanna’s house? If I just pretended not to know, that would be it. Orca would understand.

But if I said I didn’t know and that later a time came to talk about it, wouldn’t that be strange in its own way?

To dodge the immediate problem with a lie, I wondered if I could truly handle it when it blew up in my face later.

In the end, I had to give up on the lie and place my trust in Orca, bringing her to my house.

“…Huh, really Yoon Hamin, you have Kanna at your house?”

“I couldn’t help it. Under normal circumstances, I would have sent her home… After seeing Kanna’s condition, you’ll understand.”

I didn’t speak entirely honestly.

I mixed in a slight lie.

It was a lie that wouldn’t be noticed unless Lucia suddenly barged in and said these two have been living together from before!

She had to be discharged, but I couldn’t send her home.

After saying it that way, naturally, the point when Kanna came into my house sounded like the discharge point.

At that, Orca made a subtly complicated expression.

The voice she was about to question what I was doing faded away, replaced instead by a serious feeling of wondering what on earth had happened.

So I continued, as if to prepare her mentally.

“Don’t be too surprised. Just, it’s that all the memories we talked about at the academy are gone… and I guess her personality is just a little different.”

“…Are you saying it’s her personality before she attended the academy?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t think a person’s personality can change that easily, but if that’s the case, it would indeed be a problem.”

After hearing my words, Orca gulped as if trying to prepare herself.

“I think I understand why you mentioned that.”

I smiled bitterly as I opened the door to the house.

There was a thought that I should have told Kanna beforehand, but it was already too late.

“I’m home.”

As I took off my shoes and entered, I heard a sound of excitement.

“You’re back?”

Kanna approached, smiling brightly.

Then, she tilted her head.

She seemed to be casting her gaze at Orca behind me.

“Who?”

But there was no sign of wariness or anything.

“……”

The problem was that she didn’t even know who she was.

Orca stood frozen, shocked by Kanna’s one line, as if she had forgotten to come in. She just stared blankly at Kanna.

I whispered to Kanna.

“Kanna, this is Orca. She’s a friend of both of ours.”

“Oh, Orca…! Nice to meet you! You’re very pretty!”

Kanna seemed delighted, clasping her hands, then happily welcomed Orca inside.

I had thought she might not know what to do, saying she didn’t know the person she was meeting for the first time, but her reaction was something different, leaving me perplexed.

Orca, taken aback by Kanna’s unpredictable response, stumbled over her words, “Huh, huh,” as she came inside.

Orca’s gaze turned to me. She seemed to silently ask what to do, but I too had no idea.

I had brought her to meet Kanna because Orca wanted to, but I hadn’t expected Kanna to react this way, so I was at a loss.

It seemed that the memory Kanna had was from when she entered the academy, or perhaps a little before, yet Kanna intriguingly already knew a lot about me.

And Orca seemed to be no exception to that.

The moment Kanna heard the name Orca, she was delighted and pleased.

She was even humming a little tune, so it seemed her desire to get closer was genuine.

Since it was before any exam, there was absolutely no thought of taking advantage of anyone.

“Um, uh… Kanna, are you okay?”

“Huh? Me? Why…? Is something weird?”

“Oh, no. I was wondering if you were maybe hurt since you were in the hospital.”

“I’m all better now.”

Kanna responded nonchalantly, but it was a sight that no one, except Kanna, could call fine.

Orca was flustered. No matter how much she had been clued in by me, she hadn’t expected Kanna to be so different from the one she knew.

“Well, that’s a relief then.”

“Yeah, yeah. Orca?”

“Yes?”

“You should learn magic.”

“Magic…? Suddenly?”

Orca wasn’t the only one who was taken aback by Kanna’s words.

I too found myself looking around, wondering if it wasn’t too inefficient to learn magic when she already had excellent abilities.

Magic was something that those lacking in ability, yet having some magical power, learned to enhance their strengths.

While it could be considered a structured academic subject, ultimately, it lacked uniqueness and could only fall behind those with outstanding individual abilities, thus not being treated very well.

The significant reason for that was the difference in casting time before output or versatility.

So, saying something like that to someone as strong as Orca, who was already placed second, was nonsensical.

It was almost bordering on an insult.

However, I was already so enchanted by Kanna that I wondered if there was a reason behind it and asked.

“…Why does Kanna think that?”

I gently inquired as if to understand the reason behind her words, and Orca, who hesitated to respond, sent me a fleeting glance and fell silent.

Kanna turned her gaze from Orca to me and answered that question.

“Well, if you don’t have abilities, you have to at least use magic.”

“Kanna, I already have outstanding abilities, so that doesn’t matter to me.”

“No!”

Kanna suddenly shouted.

Surprised, Orca stared at Kanna with wide eyes.

Kanna continued speaking, ignoring her scrutinizing gaze.

“…Orca needs to learn magic.”

She seemed like a stubborn child.

Someone who made judgments with an arbitrary perspective.

She felt like someone trying to give unwanted advice, so hearing that didn’t inspire thoughts of “Ah, I need to learn magic.”

But Kanna didn’t elaborate beyond that.

I wanted to ask, but I sensed that any information that wouldn’t come out of someone like Kanna would remain unheard indefinitely.

I was curious about what she knew and what she was hiding.

Without knowing that, it was hard to grasp why Kanna was saying those things.

“Kanna.”

“……”

“I understand it’s confusing. Later, when I regain my memory, I’ll come back. I have too many things I want to say.”

Orca gently spoke to her.

Kanna pouted as if to say she hadn’t said anything strange at all.

Eventually, Orca briefly checked on Kanna’s condition before saying she had things to do and left.

Left alone again, I glanced at Kanna.

Sitting on the sofa with a sulky expression, Kanna was pouting.

I smiled bitterly at her and carefully asked.

“…Why did you want Orca to learn magic?”

I asked politely.

If she didn’t want to answer, I didn’t intend to press further.

But Kanna, it seemed, was just unwilling to share more information in front of Orca, and she answered me clearly.

“Because, because if Hamin doesn’t, he’ll cry.”

“I…?”

“Yeah, if Orca is in danger, Hamin will cry.”

A chill ran down my spine at that moment.

“Why did you think Orca would be in danger…?”

“Well, because there’s a possibility that she might lose her abilities like this?”

“……”

Could it be that Kanna knows about the monster that swallowed my abilities?

When she mentioned losing her abilities, was she referring to the situation I was experiencing now?

“Are you saying it’s because of the monster that devours abilities?”

“H-how did you know?”

“…It seems that monster has taken my power.”

“Ah.”

Kanna displayed an expression of disbelief.

Her sigh held a hint of desperation.

“H-Hamin, what do we do? Why has it come to this? It shouldn’t have happened…”

Those words struck me as if I were the one experiencing what Orca was meant to go through.

She acted as if she knew the future, as if she had come from the future.

Not that she could see the future, but rather as if she had already lived through it.

If that’s the case, then it suddenly made sense.

It could explain how she knew me even after returning to a past point.

“It’s okay. Just do as you said.”

“Ah…”

Kanna seemed to feel reassured by my vague hesitance and closed her mouth.

Then she wiped the uncertain expression from her face and raised the corners of her lips.

“Then that’s a relief.”

“…Yeah.”

“By the way, you both seem to suit each other well!”

But conversely, it felt like the corners of my mouth were only turning downward.

Ch. 98 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 98

Who do you think suits me well?

Orca? No, I have never thought that I would suit Orca.

Besides, the person I want to be with is none other than Kanna, and since Kanna is saying such things, I felt unnecessarily petulant.

I couldn’t act petulantly toward Kanna, who was smiling innocently and speaking.

“No, we’re not that close.”

“…Huh? Oh, really?”

As I subtly denied it, Kanna realized that it was different from what she had thought and let out a dazed voice.

Then she drooped her head.

“I-I’m sorry…”

I had some idea of why Kanna was acting that way.

Since she didn’t confirm it, I couldn’t be sure, but I thought it was possible that she had seen what would happen in the future.

Look at this.

Earlier, it passed naturally, but now Kanna is recognizing the presence of a monster that shouldn’t be in her memory.

The monster with the ability to devour and seal others’ abilities wasn’t even the first monster to appear.

If she remembers events from two or three months later, or if that incident was even brought forward, it would be certain that she was already aware of events much later.

Kanna’s memory, which has returned to an earlier time, contains events that she hasn’t yet experienced.

They say people feel fear of the unknown.

I knew those events existed, but the very fact that I didn’t know them was itself unknown, which made me feel fear.

If I genuinely wanted to ask, I should ask Kanna when her mind was properly intact.

This is the opportunity. I thought it wasn’t wise to press her about it. I even doubted whether I could handle it when her memory came back.

I didn’t want to be hated.

But if I asked if Kanna could be reverted back, well, it’s hard to say, right?

It was impossible to return Kanna like this just on the advice of a doctor without any treatment.

So ultimately, I had no choice but to lean on a workaround.

If one totem was insufficient, I could just bring two or three more for Kanna to absorb.

If treating her body required other conditions, I might not know, but considering that her limbs were growing back, and that she barely managed

to cling to life, it didn’t seem impossible.

“You have nothing to apologize for.”

“…Mm.”

I comforted Kanna like that and soon fell into thought.

The totems were already known within the barrier, and the heroes spent their patrols trying to remove them.

Given that, it was hard to find one to hand over to Kanna.

Even if I found one, I realized it would be troublesome if someone else noticed it.

So, where could I get a totem?

The barrier was already being rebuilt, and I couldn’t just go outside and ask for a totem from monsters.

Even if it wasn’t rebuilt, ordinary people wouldn’t be able to withstand unrefined magical power outside the barrier for long.

So ultimately, I would have to get it from an agency that collects and processes them, or even negotiate with a higher-level organization.

It was baffling.

From the moment I asked for that, I’d be looked at strangely, and if I said I’d use it to treat Kanna, I felt like I would be dragged away immediately.

I felt like I would have to cut off her limbs again.

No, cutting off limbs would be fortunate; I had no confidence that she would return next time.

“Kanna, did you eat what I prepared for lunch?”

“Yeah! It was delicious.”

“I’m glad; I’ll make hamburgers for dinner.”

As I saw Kanna’s joyful expression, I pondered several times.

I want to heal Kanna. But I can’t trust anyone.

Standing at that crossroads, I could only blankly stare at the street.

I could protect Kanna with force, but because I was restricted, I couldn’t do anything, and if I just stood still without asking for help, I felt uneasy about leaving Kanna like this.

I can’t lean on anyone.

Is this what it feels like not to be able to trust?

If there were a guarantee that I would return safely without any injuries, I would have asked long ago.

Just giving me the totem would be enough, but they wouldn’t simply give away such things, so I repeated this dilemma.

Should I try? Isn’t trying dangerous?

Would Kanna get involved? If I keep my mouth shut, wouldn’t it be unknown if it was related to Kanna?

Although this is the matter of an academy student, would they really not know just because I kept quiet? Well, I doubt that.

Of course, heroes cannot thoroughly search and find all the totems. Since they don’t resonate just by getting close like Kanna, there can be things that heroes might miss.

But in order to find such things, I would need to accompany Kanna, and with many eyes around, I would have to consider whether it was really the

right thing to take Kanna, who vividly remained in my memory.

“Sigh.”

A sigh escaped from me.

“What’s wrong? Are you struggling?”

“…No, I just have some things on my mind.”

“Really?”

After hesitating for a moment, I looked at Kanna.

“Kanna.”

“Yeah?”

“Do you think it would be good if you could regain your memory?”

As I asked like that, Kanna nodded her head.

“If Hamin is okay with it, then I’m okay with anything. What do you prefer?”

I see.

Regaining lost memories isn’t that important for the person involved, surprisingly.

Especially if it’s not something painfully related to family.

Who would nod their head when suddenly asked to search for something they might not know they lost and didn’t recognize as theirs?

It seemed that the memories from those two or three months didn’t seem to hold much value for Kanna.

Though they were lost memories, not even realizing that they were lost made it not so desperate.

Moreover, even if they were lost, she didn’t feel any particular disruption in her life, so it didn’t feel strange to her.

So it seemed awkward for me to say that I would find her memories.

But still, I’m okay. Please don’t worry. It felt warm for some reason when she asked which way I preferred instead of just saying that.

In fact, I wished she wouldn’t look for her memories.

Not because I had any other desires, but I wondered what good it was to search for painful memories.

I also wished that we could just start everything over from the beginning and live our lives like this.

But doing that wouldn’t allow me to achieve anything.

What could truly be achieved after running away?

Who would like it if I said I was starting over after losing my memory?

Would losing the self that existed at that time really be pleasant?

For that reason, while I hoped for Kanna’s happiness, I still wished for her to regain her memories.

Surely, having regained her memory, she would also regain her happiness.

Since it wouldn’t be possible to regain her memory overnight, it would be enough to change her surrounding environment in the meantime.

As I told Orca during the day, it would start with me experiencing last place myself.

“…I hope you regain your memory, Kanna.”

After I said that, Kanna nodded her head and seemed to want to respond somehow.

I thought she would say, “Okay, I’ll go along with that,” and so I covered her mouth with my hand.

Surprised, Kanna looked at me with wide eyes.

“I don’t want you to say anything right now.”

“Uh?”

“Right now, any remark would come lightly to you, and I don’t want to run away with light words.”

I said that.

Kanna seemed confused, but I was clearly aware.

Everything felt infinitely light with lost memories.

Since it didn’t feel like something she experienced directly, she forgave easily, and also easily nodded her head to such things.

But if she just apologized like that, and then respected my opinions, saying she would follow them, would she be able to say the same words again when she regained her memory?

Would the words she spoke without memories become a stumbling block that only poisons her emotions?

So I opened the door for her to blame me, asking why I made her regain her memory, for not wanting such painful memories.

Even if I were truly a bad person, I was prepared to accept that.

“…So, please don’t say anything now.”

If I run away, I would distance myself from Kanna and would never be able to get close again.

Thinking that way, I stood before her confidently.

Kanna stayed still for a moment and then slightly nodded.

Now what I had to do was to obtain a totem.

Finding it would be easier if Kanna were there, but I had to consider whether to take her with me or not.

I resolved to use asking someone in the association as a last resort.

As I was revamping my resolve, her mouth, which I had let go of, opened.

“…Thank you.”

“Uh?”

“I didn’t know you would think of me that much.”

“……No, I’m the one who’s sorry.”

I hoped Kanna would smile. I wished she would stay by my side.

I hoped she wouldn’t be hurt and wouldn’t cry.

Though I moved with such a wish, now guilt was added.

Just watching her go through this was tearing my heart apart.

In a corner of my heart, which I couldn’t say was completely nonexistent, the guilt that I had turned Kanna into someone different from the one I first encountered, like all the others in the academy, was crushing me painfully.

I had truly done wrong.

I should have saved her sooner, but I couldn’t.

I wanted to apologize.

Ch. 99 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 99

At first, when Yoon Hamin said Kanna’s condition was not good, I thought it made sense.

She had just been discharged from the hospital and must have been struggling, so how genuine would it feel if I suddenly approached her and said, “I want to apologize for keeping my distance. I’m sorry”?

Depending on the situation, it could look like I was trying to be easily forgiven while she was overwhelmed.

So, I decided to wait.

However, when I heard that Yoon Hamin was intentionally trying to place last in the rankings, and detailed conversations about Kanna followed, I became curious.

What could Kanna’s situation be?

In the end, I found out that after her discharge, she was actually staying at Yoon Hamin’s house, and I went to see it for myself.

At first, I wondered why Kanna would be at Yoon Hamin’s house, but then I thought it made sense since they had become close. She might have no one else to rely on except for Yoon Hamin.

In any case, that wasn’t the problem.

I knew it was shameful to make excuses, but I felt embarrassed that I had distanced myself from Kanna, as if I were following the mood of the family.

I wanted to apologize for that.

But the moment I faced Kanna, I realized I couldn’t do that. I painfully felt the truth in that.

“Who is it?”

Kanna’s voice was directed at me.

I couldn’t say anything. I had heard she had forgotten, but confronting her head-on felt so different.

I swallowed hard. I searched for the right words, but again, there was nothing I could say.

And at the moment Yoon Hamin introduced me, Kanna immediately recognized me.

“Oh, Orca…! Hi! Nice to meet you! You’re so pretty!”

She might not have remembered me, but it seemed like she recalled who I was the moment she heard my name.

Did Yoon Hamin talk about me? I mean, it wouldn’t make sense for her to know the name without recognizing the face.

I was slightly irritated by her childish mannerisms, but as Yoon Hamin said, I could definitely sense her vibrant personality.

No matter how childish she had become, her personality wouldn’t change that much.

Returning to a childlike state would still differentiate between the timid child and the active child, and Kanna was the latter.

She was just as Yoon Hamin had described.

If Kanna’s personality really was like this before she started attending the Academy, then it meant the atmosphere of the Academy was pushing a

person’s personality into the gutter.

I could understand why she would deliberately want to come in last.

I could vaguely sense what she might be expecting from such behavior, but who knows.

I had some doubts about whether she could achieve the results she was hoping for.

Seeing Kanna’s original personality made my heart ache.

What kind of emotions did Yoon Hamin feel when Kanna regained consciousness?

What emotions did he harbor seeing her not recognize him at all, forgetting what she had done, and being unable to feel anger or forgiveness towards the things she had gone through?

I couldn’t say a single word.

Surely looking at Kanna’s condition, I thought I would apologize if she seemed okay, but strangely I felt that even saying I hoped she would be well felt like an insult.

Is it truly a good thing to leave her without memories?

But if left that way, she would live without knowing what happened to her, forgetting both the perpetrator and the fact that she was a victim—would that be okay?

I wasn’t apologizing to seek forgiveness.

If Kanna ignored me, that would be unavoidable; my way was to continue atoning.

For that reason, I respected Kanna’s choices.

If she was scared and felt anguish about regaining her memories, then there was no need to remember.

What’s wrong with fleeing from suffering and pain?

Those who sincerely want to apologize might be in anguish, but since I wanted Kanna to suffer less, I wanted to be unobtrusive.

It felt vague.

I thought I had made the right choice in deciding to apologize.

Changing my mind was definitely a good thing.

If I had opened my mouth like a parrot, blindly parroting the family’s thoughts without any opinion, I would have likely reached an irretrievable point.

Kanna fought against monsters until she became like this. Isn’t this what it means to be a hero?

Looking at this, could I really still say it was treason?

Even if it wasn’t treason, if the mere existence posed a threat to the barrier and they tried to drive her out, I wanted to throw a vote against that.

According to Yoon Hamin, if the monsters were taking such measures to reach Kanna, then surely it would persuade those who decide on executions based on necessity.

It was a day filled with many thoughts.

I was the one who said I would go see Kanna, but after actually seeing her, my heart felt troubled, and neither my studies nor family business mattered to me anymore.

I could only think about how to resolve this situation and how to help Yoon Hamin.

Even though my opinions differed from the family's, I couldn't go against the family while following Yoon Hamin.

It might be romantic to say, "I'm turning my back on the family and will accomplish something as an individual," but in reality, doing that would yield minor satisfaction now and lead to failing at the major achievements I needed in the future.

It wouldn't be too late to change the world after inheriting the family leadership.

Even if right now seems unreasonable, I'll be able to change the environment that causes despair for others.

I didn't have to walk the same path as Yoon Hamin.

I just needed to find and walk my own path.

Of course, that path might be a bit rough and painful, but since it wasn't a path created by anyone else, I had no choice but to accept it.

Kanna, Kanna Aurora.

When it was said that I was her, it felt strange.

Was I Kanna Aurora? Is that really who I am?

Then what were all the things I knew? Were all the things I used to know merely things of the future?

Like reading a book, I had been aware of what would happen.

But the world was turning out differently from what I knew.

Surely, surely I thought I would be able to do well, but that's not the case.

Am I being too whiny? Shouldn't I be dependent on such things?

Every time Hamin talked about things I didn’t know, I lowered my head.

With everything I knew turned upside down, I found it hard to think of solutions.

Orca has lost her powers. She’s lost her powers due to monsters. Those monsters took Hamin’s abilities away.

Why? How did things end up like this?

I definitely didn’t foresee such a future; it wasn’t what I intended.

It’s strange. The things I can do are gradually dwindling.

But Hamin keeps smiling at me, and that makes me happy.

The other heroes are on guard without me saying a word. It’s not dangerous. It’s different from what I knew, but it seems a bit more hopeful.

“Hamin.”

“Yeah?”

“It’s delicious.”

I hope this way of living continues.

I hope Hamin continues his life at the Academy.

It’s tough having to wait alone at home, but while I am okay, it feels annoying that I am still treated like a patient. Yet, if Hamin can go to the Academy, play with friends, make precious people, and protect them till the end, then I would be satisfied.

The reason I came here must be to make Hamin smile.

But I’m constantly reminded of something strange.

Hamin had been connected to Orca, so why did he say Orca wasn’t?

Is it because of me? Did he mumble that they weren’t dating because of me?

It feels strange that there would be no school rule making them do something like a secret relationship.

I feel a bit insecure since I have nothing that resembles what I knew.

Isn’t it the case that information that should be revealed later is now coming to light? Isn’t Yoon Hamin going to face the scheme of the monster that Orca has to face later on?

What should I do? Orca could survive just by learning magic, but Hamin is different, and that worries me even more.

In the end, it has to be Hamin fighting in the end; his abilities are essential.

Still, since Hamin is asking me to trust him to some extent, I have no choice but to believe him.

I trust Hamin. I’m sure this time he will change the future I knew.

Seeing how much he has changed already, I believe he will clear away the coming tragedy.

How it ended up like this is a mystery to me.

“Hamin, Hamin.”

“What? Is it delicious?”

“How are you going to use your ability?”

“What about it?”

“You said you were eaten by the monster.”

I wanted him to get better quickly.

So I asked, but Yoon Hamin seemed flustered.

“Um, I don’t know. I’m currently looking for other methods, but if it continues like this, wouldn’t it be faster to find the monster and deal with it?”

Huh, wouldn’t that be too far in the future?

It seems like they frequently attack from what I’ve seen on the news, but ummm…

I really don’t know.

Everything I knew has already changed, so it feels like what I don’t know has become the norm.

I’m an idiot. I know nothing.

Even if I try to act like I know, it seems like everything I say is either something everyone else knows or completely incorrect.

I know nothing.

But still, Yoon Hamin will be fine.

If I trust too much, it might be hard for him, so all I have to do is watch over him.

If Yoon Hamin says he can’t do it, then I should step in!

But I don’t know how to intervene effectively.

“Then should I try some ability training too?”

“No.”

Aww.

I thought it was a good idea.

Ch. 100 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 100

When do stars shine the brightest?

They shine the most when the sun sets, and people wander in the deep darkness.

Once you step outside the buildings and away from the trees, you see the stars. A wave of stars that anyone can gain by simply looking up at the sky.

Within that, people name them and assign meanings, using the brightest stars as signposts to find their way.

Because they shine the brightest in the darkness, people tend to rely more on that light.

They took the sun, which originally brought light, for granted, believing it would rise again even if it sets, and during that dark period, it was human psychology to depend on the stars.

It’s natural and an unchanging fact, but while it sounds good to compare it to a single night, the reality is that peace is often something you can only find over days, months, or even years, which makes it feel overwhelming.

Peace will come someday. Happiness will surely find its way into this barrier someday.

But when exactly will that be?

When will monsters stop breaking down the barriers, and when will they stop trampling on people?

No matter how strongly one tries to build it, the barriers surrounding humanity to protect it are unreasonably long and wide.

In reality, nothing seems practicable.

All I could do was hope that monsters wouldn’t come. If not that, then I had to defeat them.

If not, the sun would never rise in this city, in this world. In a life that must depend on the faintly shining stars in the dark night, wouldn’t it be sad?

I wished for the power of those stars to become meaningless. Even if the sun comes someday and dims, I feel like it would truly be happiness.

Only when such a world comes will Kanna, who is here, not suffer from any harm.

“How can I get the totem…”

I aim to restore Kanna to her original self. That was my first goal.

It didn’t need to be the very first thing. Even if changing the atmosphere of the academy became the first, it wouldn’t be strange.

In any case, I wanted anything to happen quickly.

Then should I take Kanna away while avoiding the eyes of other heroes?

If I happen to find a hidden totem near the barrier, would it be somewhat okay?

I was worried that taking Kanna with me was too much of a gamble.

But if I was going to do it, I thought it might be more manageable to do it before I got last place on purpose to change the academy.

Let’s also tell Sel in advance.

Can I get help from Boss Reg? If not, at least from Sel personally.

Or maybe from Arden Agency? No, I didn’t want to incur debt when I didn’t even know what would happen to Kanna.

The only one I could still turn to for help was Orca, but I felt a bit sorry for dragging her into this and making it hard for her as well.

She might say she would help if I asked, but I didn’t know how to ask about the totem, so I had no choice but to give up.

So I pondered repeatedly and eventually picked up the device.

A week passed, and I met Sel on the weekend.

Blue hair, blue eyes. Sel, the owner of the blue flames.

“…Hello, Senpai.”

“Oh, it’s our junior.”

I had already talked over the phone about the situation and what was needed.

But after thinking for a moment, Sel only told me to come and ask directly.

It would be a nuisance to hear various bad things while she unnecessarily took my place in a matter that was mine, and for Sel, it would surely become an unpleasant memory.

So I accepted that opinion and stood here.

To persuade Boss Reg Pelain of the Frica Agency.

“Is it really necessary?”

“…Yes, Senpai, you saw it too.”

“That’s true.”

Sel heard what I said, but she still couldn’t easily accept it.

If someone else, she might worry about whether they could handle the unrefined magical power being used for self-regeneration. Was that even something that could be justified?

I witnessed the arms and legs that had been attached suddenly fall off, and in that moment, new flesh began to grow, forming arms and skin.

That sight was something I would never forget even if I lived a lifetime.

It was the first time I had heard that a person could regenerate like that.

“Kanna got involved in such a thing.”

“What do you think, Senpai? Do you also think it’s strange?”

“No, well, it’s hard to answer straightforwardly when you ask me directly~”

“…Is it really a bit that way?”

When I rephrased her nonchalant answer, she seemed startled and exclaimed to me.

“Look at this! I can’t even make jokes anymore. It’s not about that, it’s just ambiguous. To be honest, either way makes sense, right?”

“Yeah?”

“Just by existing, a monster might help break down the barriers. Just that fact alone makes people unable to sleep at night. How anxious must that be?”

Sel took the opinion expressed at the Hero Association into her mouth.

I felt like I would get angry, but I gritted my teeth and waited for her next words.

“But your point isn’t wrong either. If a being is so bothersome that it repeatedly breaks down barriers and tries to k*ll, it has enough value to protect humanity. And if it’s bothersome enough to be bothersome, then there’s even more reason.”

Saying that, Sel seemed to be tilting her head, perhaps trying to find some compromise.

But there couldn’t be a compromise in such a place.

It was a battle of whether to cast Kanna out or to protect her.

“No matter how many people she saved, in the end, they might be at risk again, so they want to exclude her. Is that what it is?”

“The Association probably thinks that way. We hope that Kanna turns out to be good for the monsters, but the reality now is that we can’t prove that, right?”

“…That’s true.”

“So it’s a dilemma. Neither side can be made an easy choice.”

I ground my teeth.

Faced with the choice of killing or saving people, I never thought I would express it as a dilemma.

No, of course, while doing social work, I might have realized that one has to go along with those above, and it can feel like something you can’t resist.

But to me now, those were unacceptable things.

Am I being too greedy? Is it greedy to just wish for things to go well by only hearing good things from the start?

I just want to say to leave Kanna alone, but is that greed?

“For now, go in and have a good conversation with the Boss. Just talking to me for a thousand years doesn’t influence anything, right?”

“Yes, understood.”

I nodded.

Just saying that didn’t make me hate her or anything.

It was just that the fact that Kanna might be executed or banished outside the barrier depending on the opinions of the majority made me feel gloomy.

I passed through the sleek building and entered inside.

Inside the office was another reception room, which was the boss’s office.

Even calling it an office, it was mainly a waiting place for heroes to rest briefly before heading out, so it didn’t need to be a large space.

After a moment, I followed Sel’s guidance and stepped inside.

“Oh, Yoon Hamin.”

“Hello. I’m Yoon Hamin, a first-year student at the Academy.”

“I already know. Reg Pelain. Is this how it works?”

Reg pointed towards the guest seating from the office desk.

I took a seat next to Reg in the honored seat and carefully started the conversation.

“Would you like some coffee?”

“Oh, no, I’m fine. I just came to ask a few things…”

“A student from the Academy asking the president of a hero agency for a favor.”

He slightly adjusted his pure white hair that he had swept back and nodded.

“Interesting. What’s the matter?”

He must have allowed this meeting to hear a certain amount of the story from Sel, yet here he was being playful.

Or perhaps he wanted to hear it again in my voice, through my mouth, to judge.

“Do you know about Kanna’s condition?”

“I know about the prosthetic limbs.”

“What about the fact that her arms and legs have grown back?”

“I know that too.”

This was something the heroes couldn’t be unaware of.

It had already been a widely spread rumor among heroes.

“Kanna reacts to unrefined magical power in that way. The regeneration of her arms and legs and her revival just before dying all come from that.”

So? I shrank back under his gaze which seemed to say that.

Feeling small didn’t mean I couldn’t speak up.

I had come this far for Kanna, so I had no choice but to continue.

“So, uh, if you happen to find something like a totem nearby, could you possibly share it? I will make sure to repay you.”

“Why do you need that totem? You said her arms had healed and she’s no longer in danger.”

“Right now, I… have sustained a head injury and can’t remember anything.

I don’t even remember that I fought for my life against a monster this time. So I wanted to heal that.”

“Hmm.”

Reg stroked his chin, pondering.

Then he removed his hand and placed it on his knee.

“I can’t easily grant you that. Since unrefined magical power is on the other side of the barrier, it’s impossible to transfer, and isn’t the totem a monster’s possession? Reviving a person with it would raise too many questions.”

I remained silent, closing my mouth tightly.

“Just the fact that you’ve gone against the advice not to contact monsters and fought makes it hard to resolve things. I want to cover it up to some extent, but I would prefer not to do anything that draws more attention.”

“…I’m sorry. I’ll remember that.”

Ultimately, it was a dead end.

I had only conveyed information, but there was nothing I could receive.

They must have already claimed their innocence by fighting the monster, yet the fact that it was a topic needing to be managed was absurd.

No matter how strong the power, seeing this truly made me feel powerless.

I’m sorry, Kanna.

It looks like the treatment will be a bit delayed.

Ch. 101 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 101

“Ha.”

I let out a sigh.

It was a breath I released because I was so overwhelmed that I couldn’t figure out what else to do.

Let’s take the safest route back for Kanna. I thought of asking for help, but instead of receiving any assistance, I just ended up providing information about this side myself.

If I had heard it all from the beginning, I should have said it wouldn’t work and left it at that. How is it reasonable to say “do better” after hearing everything?

If you say that and then help, I would genuinely appreciate it, but seeing the atmosphere directed towards Kanna so far makes it seem impossible, and that only deepened my gloom.

The situation was so bleak that I wanted to tear my hair out.

I was irritated by the helplessness of not being able to do anything.

If I were an adult, if I were a hero instead of a student.

It was an implausible “what if,” but the desperate desire to grasp at straws kept me thinking those thoughts.

Why do I keep getting stuck somewhere and unable to do anything?

Even if I were chosen and loved by the stars, there seems to be a limit to what I can accomplish.

I shouldn’t stop here; I must move forward.

I felt like dissatisfaction was about to burst out, yet I had no idea how to resolve this.

Am I being judged just for being young?

If only they would listen to even a small voice and judge accordingly, perhaps we could produce better results.

Of course, I knew there were quite a few who would suffer because the barrier fell.

Still, the desire to continue persisted.

Then does that mean I must retrieve the totem alone?

It’s Kanna’s issue, but if I pull her into it, it would be dangerous. Yet, I felt that I wouldn’t be able to find the hidden totem by myself.

If I could treat Kanna, if only I could return her to how she was, I would be satisfied with just that. But if danger arises, both treatment and restoring her seem like mere wishes, and I thought that nothing would come true, making me hesitant.

As I shuffled my feet home, Kanna came rushing out, as if she had heard the door open.

“Did you come back? Welcome!”

A bright greeting.

“Yeah, I’m back.”

If I healed her, I wouldn’t receive such a greeting. That made it even more heartbreaking.

But I hated even more the fact that I had to continue this life.

If the time comes when she remembers, wouldn’t that lost time for Kanna be the things she didn’t want to do, stretching out the period of saying or doing things?

“Hamin, you look unhappy…”

“Oh, no. I just think I got a bit hot being outside.”

I replied with a vague wave of my hand, and Kanna, seeming relieved, relaxed her expression.

Given the situation, it was long gone that the festival we were supposed to have in May at the Academy still existed. I had planned to experience various things with Kanna, but now it all felt wasted.

The festival was gone, and Kanna was sick.

Lost in such thoughts, I turned to Kanna.

“… I will definitely make you better.”

Kanna returned my words.

“Yeah, thank you!”

Just her gratitude for my efforts brought a bright smile to her face.

*

After the weekend, Wednesday arrived, and the final week of exams in May began.

I thought the reduced frequency of exams might mean I could breathe a little, but it actually didn’t matter for this exam.

Before the exam started, I had a brief moment to talk and glanced at Orca, standing next to me.

“… Are you really going to come in last?”

I had already asked this several times over the weekend, on Monday, and again on Tuesday.

She asked with a worried tone, and I repeatedly assured her that I was fine and would do well.

But on the day itself, I couldn’t help but notice how concerned she seemed, truly worrying if I would really end up last.

I could see how much she cared about me.

Seeing the strong competitive spirit she had, it must have been tough for her to think that a rival she considered a wall might fall.

Even so, since it’s for Kanna, I couldn’t bring myself to stop her; her determination was truly beautiful.

“Yeah.”

I didn’t hesitate.

“I’ll come in last, so you keep being the top student.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t do it like you, Yoon Hamin…”

“You don’t have to feel guilty.”

I shrugged towards her genuine expression of remorse.

“You have your own responsibilities.”

“Thank you for understanding. Instead, I will continue to keep my position at the top, and in the future, I will create a world where someone like Kanna can live well. I will make a world where people like Kanna won’t exist

anymore.”

“… That’s enough.”

I said that and checked the time.

It was time to go for the exam.

“Oh, right, Yoon Hamin.”

“Yeah?”

“So, did you not study at all? You can’t lie in the practical exam.”

Honestly, while there are students who improve in practicals, none regress. Since that was a basic rule, it didn’t make sense that a student who previously scored poorly suddenly failed.

Considering that Orca was concerned about this, I thought it might be fine since I had my own circumstances.

“My ability weakened. I got hit by a monster.”

“What? Wait, I haven’t heard such a thing…!”

“And I finished studying for the written part. It’s easier to guess wrong than to know and get it wrong.”

Orca stared at me in disbelief.

“You are truly something else…”

“If I’m going to fail, I should fail properly.”

I said that and turned my steps towards the classroom.

I took the exam.

Subjects like Korean, Math, Science, History, and Geography poured out in a rush.

When I opened the exam sheet, there were no unfamiliar questions. With just the thought of studying for Kanna, I reached a level where I could easily derive the answers.

I had studied this way before, but unlike before, the problem this time was that I had to mark the wrong answers.

What kind of grade would make me come in last?

Kanna would score zero in the practical, so that was laid out, but how should I go about coming last?

I felt like a crazy person having to think about how to come in last.

Even so, if I were to go crazy, it’s better to be this crazy.

When I thought of Kanna, my hesitation disappeared.

With the pen in hand, I wrote down my answers.

If I’m going to fail, let’s fail completely. With that one thought, I wrote down only one or two correct answers and made everything else wrong.

If 3 was the answer, I marked 1, and if 4 was the answer, I chose 3.

Knowing the answers, it was also possible to deliberately miss them.

And in the end, the teacher who was temporarily grading my paper seemed to be aghast and called me over before the practical exam.

“Yoon Hamin, what is this?”

“… What are you talking about?”

I had just finished lunch with Orca and was about to head to the practicals when Teacher Lucia stopped me and demanded an explanation.

In her small hand was my answer sheet.

When she reached the point where the number of wrong answers exceeded five during grading, she must have ran to find me out of sheer disbelief.

“This. Do you know how this will affect your grades? I haven’t graded everything yet, but there are already plenty of wrong answers…! What on earth is going on?”

What should I say in response?

If they wanted to see their true nature, it would have been better to act like a madman rather than a top student, but what I wanted to do was a kind of protest, so I had to convey that it was my whim.

It wasn’t just for fun.

I had to express that.

“Teacher, I have lost confidence in heroes.”

“… Excuse me?”

“Even though Kanna threw herself into something that hurt her so badly, the Hero Association took no action. Why do they turn a blind eye when she’s a student at the Academy, even if she’s not a hero?”

I said that and glared at the teacher.

Her pupils trembled.

“I came into contact with monsters. It’s suspicious. Such remarks have already lost their weight. They merely try to exclude and guard against anyone who can break the barrier, claiming the potential damage is too great.”

“But you know it can’t be helped. I’m just a teacher, and I can’t say more, and it’s frustrating…! Why should Kanna’s pain lead to Yoon Hamin’s life being ruined?”

The teacher fluttered the answer sheet she was holding.

Ignoring that, I continued.

“Teacher, are you saying you agree with forcibly pulling out someone who hasn’t volunteered to be sacrificed for peace?”

“That…!”

Peace stained with bl**d.

A tranquility filled with lies.

A smile built on falsehoods.

If you live there, you are no longer human.

That must be a monster.

“If that’s what a hero is, I want to quit.”

“Wait a moment, Yoon Hamin. I think you’re acting too rashly. Think it over. If you give up your life like this, you might lose the chance to become a great person who can change this situation later.”

If you want to change, then rise to a position where you can change.

That was a profoundly correct and just statement.

I wasn’t unaware that enduring the absurdities and cutting off the chain in the end was the most important thing.

But by then, wouldn’t it be too late?

If things went on like this, there might not be a future for Kanna; if we don’t change it now, it would mean nothing.

I knew it was reckless, yet I had no choice but to move forward.

I had no way out.

It had to be that way.

The only future I could envision was one where Kanna was gone.

“Perhaps, but if my life is going to be ruined over something like that, I think it’s okay for it to be ruined.”

I said there was no reason to give up my life, but if sacrificing my life led to such a change, I would willingly offer it.

If I could save Kanna, and if I could just be by her side, I would consider my life a success.

Instead of a hero who seeks peace by forcibly sacrificing one chosen by the majority,

I will become a hero who protects the one who wishes to sacrifice for the many.

Following Kanna’s words to become a star,

I would become the star for Kanna, who is trapped in darkness and anxious.

Ch. 102 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 102

The teacher seemed displeased with the choice I made, as he kept glancing at me every time there was a moment of rest after the exam.

Since we were in the middle of the exam, he didn’t speak to me, perhaps sensing it would be inappropriate to call me out, but I continually felt his intense gaze.

That emotion soon exploded during the final practical test.

“Yoon Hamin!”

Everyone’s attention focused on that voice.

“Yes?”

As I casually turned my head, a voice came flying at me as if to say, “This is just unacceptable.”

“What are you doing, Yoon Hamin?”

Everyone was surprised by the teacher’s shout during the exam, but there were no strange glances. This was because many present believed the teacher’s anger was justified.

The exam was to test how much damage could be inflicted on the monster by attacking the training dummy, but I hadn’t put in any effort at all.

Having had my ability swallowed by a monster before, I couldn’t properly manifest my powers. Yet, I didn’t even try to exert myself more or make

any efforts.

Under normal circumstances, I would have pierced straight through the dummy's head, causing an explosion that shattered it into pieces to take first place, but now I could only manage a flicker of light that barely touched the head before dwindling, which made the teacher angry.

Everyone was looking at me, wondering why I was underperforming.

Though I didn't receive the same gazes as Kanna had, since I was once the top student, I couldn't completely avoid the looks of confusion.

"Teacher, I did my best!"

"No, how is this even possible? …How could your ability suddenly drop like this…?"

During the previous practical class, I had skimped out, claiming I wasn't feeling well, and the teacher had not easily accepted this situation.

Finding it absurd, I let out a hollow laugh and looked again at the dummy I had attacked. The expression on the teacher's face seemed to question whether I was being serious, but I was able to respond calmly.

"I think my ability was consumed by the monster when I faced it before. Since it hasn't completely vanished, it seems like there are restrictions in place. I assure you, this is me doing my best."

"…What monster?"

Hearing that, I slightly turned my head.

"If you're a top-tier student here, you should know. Three monsters came in. The first one had been bringing monsters out from a small orb, and another one fought while regenerating its body. The third one swallowed my ability and fled."

There were murmurs of disbelief in response to my words.

With three monsters having entered and one of the fleeing monsters being responsible, it was hard to deny, and there were a few who had witnessed my fight with the monster, making my statement even more credible.

If only it had all been a lie that sounded plausible, but it was unfortunate that all of it was the truth.

“Anyway, I’m not intentionally attacking weakly. I tried to output the same as before, but I couldn’t.”

The teacher frowned at those words, but realizing it would be futile to argue further, seemed to relent and nodded.

“…Alright, then I’ll record it as such.”

I quietly turned my head at that sight.

I brushed off the concentrated gaze and took a light breath.

*

Ordinary students go to school.

Those who haven’t awakened cannot follow the awakened ones, but that doesn’t mean they are incapable, so they just need to follow an education system suited for what they can do.

In contrast, anyone who becomes awakened, whether strong or weak, was allowed to go to the academy.

However, the probability of becoming an awakened one was scarce, with only one in ten possibly awakening. Thus, the association and the academy gathered students with the hope that one more would lighten the burden on others.

For example, a student like Kanna Aurora.

Standing here as a homeroom teacher, even if there are things I can see as a teacher, there are many scenarios I must turn a blind eye to.

Considering that anyone could enroll in the academy for a fee, the fact that the last place is looked down upon is unavoidable.

Not everyone has a noble sense of duty.

There are those who come in hoping for compensation that can substitute for that sense of duty.

Thus, individuals like Kanna naturally become the thorn in the side of others.

People might think, “Is this person just seeking the title of a hero without any real abilities?” or “Are they planning to sit in the office doing paperwork while bearing the title of a hero?”

Even as a teacher, I might think there could be such a character. I had long turned my eye away, pondering if it even mattered.

However, one student posed a question without turning away.

Approaching to seek the truth, they seemed to point fingers, claiming that our perspective was entirely wrong.

But even then, would the narrative change?

I was already an adult, a mere teacher who had compromised with society and repeatedly engaged in such compromises.

No matter how reasonable a student’s claim might seem, all I could do was mutter it in the teacher’s meeting.

If it even could be brought up as an agenda there, I found it doubtful if it would even go through, and thus, there was nothing I could do even if I heard that student’s words.

For this reason, Yoon Hamin’s words elicited no interest from me.

From the start, I was puzzled as to why they would make such choices.

If they stepped back and worked harder, they could maintain their position as the top student, have opportunities to enter the heart of the association, and create the world they desired from there. Why would they want to upend the game so soon?

Even if it appeared that I liked Kanna Aurora—or maybe we liked each other already—there must still be boundaries.

No matter how good it seemed, it was a fleeting emotion, and it could lead to cracks that would make us regret this moment.

Watching the reckless actions, I found Yoon Hamin's behavior frustrating as it felt like they were throwing dice on a gamble while leaving the most stable path behind.

Considering Yoon Hamin's antics, I could face scrutiny from either the vice principal or the association, but what could I do? The spilled water could not be recovered.

Holding my throbbing head, I checked the report card.

After quickly inputting the data, pulling the report card out on paper, I only felt despair.

Even if I refused to accept it and requested a retest, it would create issues of fairness, making that impossible.

Looking at the report card of the top student now in last place burned within me.

They'd surely regret it. What on earth were they thinking by doing this?

In truth, even if they acted this way, they would inevitably be labeled as a foolish person swept up in emotions, and the path to the higher echelons of the association would naturally close, along with opportunities at other good agencies.

I understood that Kanna Aurora was trying hard.

Despite lacking abilities, her effort to overcome a zero score in practicals was admirable.

Even so, the fact remained that she was lacking in her ability to take down monsters, which meant there would be no support for Kanna.

Yoon Hamin. They know they're outstanding, but they also seem oblivious to the realities of the world.

Perhaps I was too decayed by society, but Yoon Hamin's actions seemed only endearing.

No matter how they went about it, no one would come to their defense.

Attempts like that would only ruin their future.

Watching someone ruin everything over a fleeting emotion, I wanted to stop them as a teacher.

It was too late now since the exam had passed, though.

Society would watch with sharp eyes. The atmosphere would be oppressive.

Could they endure it amidst that?

No matter how prepared one might be, there was no one who could persist amid overwhelming malice.

A life that is continuously denied will eventually lead to hell.

"Really…"

I let out a sigh in disbelief.

Even after handing out the report cards, my head continued to throb.

Yoon Hamin, you are wrong. Or rather, you weren’t wrong, but you chose the wrong approach.

There had to have been a better way. There’s a reason for the established norms.

At the very least, you should have taken the time. No matter how urgent the heart, you should have built your allies.

Who would stand by Yoon Hamin with this course of action?

A few students? Even if it were so, without gaining any positive support from other teachers, their power would be pitifully weak.

‘So are you saying that you would agree to force out and sacrifice someone who hasn’t made an effort for the sake of finding peace?’

…I don’t agree.

Of course, the association might think differently.

The thoughts of those in higher positions could differ.

They might have the resolve not to create further sadness, even if through such means.

They could judge that even if they took on evil, they could not bear to see unjust victims multiply into hundreds or thousands.

However, I didn’t really want peace found at the expense of someone getting singled out and cut off.

Even as a teacher, even as someone who educates, I couldn’t be sure if I was guiding towards the right path.

That’s why I hesitated multiple times.

Standing before the students, I had to repeat thousands of agonies to stand confidently and tell them this path is right.

What is right, even now that I have taken my position as a teacher, I’m still uncertain whether the students could trust and follow me.

Well.

I’m not sure, but it seemed today’s pondering would stretch on for quite some time.

Ch. 103 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 103

[VOICE ONLY]

On a large, donut-shaped table, words appeared on a long vertical blue holographic screen. It was a unique meeting space created since people could not always gather at that spot.

With the ability to participate in the meeting solely through voice, the attendees could freely speak from the safety of their homes.

Crackling noises echoed. And one screen turned on.

The screen labeled “Takas” popped up, and a voice came through.

[Is everyone gathered?]

[No, Jerome hasn’t arrived.]

Dwaig looked at the connection list displayed on the device screen and replied. Unlike the names of Takas, Dwaig, Agnol, Chei, and Karva, Jerome’s name was not lit up.

Agnol teased lightly at Dwaig’s words.

[That guy is always late.]

[Well, he must have his reasons. But it’s a bit much that he still hasn’t cleared his schedule despite being told in advance.]

Karva chimed in, sounding indifferent yet slightly annoyed.

Lastly, Chei, upon hearing their voices, spoke with a bitter smile.

[The walls have fallen this time, haven’t they? There’s a lot to recover, so that must be why.]

After all, Jerome was a council member related to the walls, leaving no other option. As Chei spoke, everyone sighed or remained silent.

Even though the walls had fallen, the most crucial issue was about to come up, and inwardly they screamed that they couldn’t ignore it, but no words came forth from their mouths.

After a moment of emotional regrouping, Takas initiated the meeting.

[Then, we have no choice but to continue with this number, and I will separately ask Jerome for his opinion.]

The meeting could not be hindered by the absence of one of the six.

Thus, they decided to proceed and each brought up issues pertaining to their respective fields.

[I heard that with the collapse of the walls, the barrier that blocks magical power has also been damaged. To reinforce everything overall, we would need a larger magical power. It’s already at its limits to draw in unrefined magical power and refine it; is there any good way?]

The walls represented a physical defense, while the barrier was an unrefined magical power defense given to humanity, which could not cover the skies. As Dwaig began to speak, the others considered countermeasures.

[Isn’t there a limit to drawing more unrefined magical power? Gathering unrefined magical power as citizens grow increasingly anxious seems counterproductive. In that case, we might have no choice but to condense the power we already possess, but it seems like we have to increase the budget as well.]

Chei spoke as though resigned, prompting a groan from Dwaig.

He understood the reluctance of using limited resources within the confined space of the walls, making him hesitate.

It seemed much more efficient, even if it was a bit of a loss, to draw in unrefined magical power to use budget-wise. However, now they had to weigh safety against it, and the necessity to increase the budget felt uncomfortable.

[If this continues, the people inside the walls will suffer. The more taxes increase, the higher prices will rise, and as prices rise, life becomes harder. To maintain humanity within the walls, wasteful spending of the budget must be reduced. Isn't there no other way?]

[Jerome knows that better than any of us.]

Karva responded like this. Tasked with security, Karva did not present an issue but merely sought to guide Dwaig toward an appropriate solution.

Rather than asking questions, he chose to conceal and restrict any information discovered, saying little beyond a certain point.

And during that silence, Agnol brought forward an issue.

[Uh, a new form of a monster, not seen before that resembles the creatures we encountered last time, has been captured, and it seems it will be more challenging to catch in the future. We might need several heroes to face one monster, so what do you propose?]

What one hero could do was limited. That limit varied according to each individual's ability, meaning that while some could stand against such monsters alone, not everyone could do so, which became a pressing problem.

Takas groaned, then opened his mouth as if offering a new countermeasure.

[Then why not differentiate by hero type? We could have heroes prioritizing to stop the new monsters and those dealing with existing ones.]

[What about classifying by rank?]

[That’s nonsense. If we start ranking human lives, there will be times heroes disappoint people just by focusing on their ranks. If we do it that way, both heroes and ordinary folks could suffer immensely.]

Agnol closed his mouth at Takas’s remarks.

He wanted to continue with the idea of determining salaries based on those ranks as proposed, but he hit a wall partway through and found no option to put forth.

Lastly, Chei continued.

[Takas, you may already know this, but there’s a student at the academy named Kanna Aurora who has encountered the monsters several times.]

Everyone had a look that seemed to ask, ‘Who is that?’ As Chei had mentioned, Takas was aware of the story.

[That student’s performance during the last battle was indeed remarkable. Apparently, they managed to protect around twenty heroes while fighting the monsters. There was an explosion of unrefined magical power, and it was such a significant event that people nearby could sense its flow. It’s miraculous that they only lost consciousness for a few days.]

[So what are you trying to say?]

Agnol urged to get to the point quickly. Chei continued as if responding to his voice.

[However, after the explosion of unrefined magical power, the student’s prosthetic arm and leg fell off, and in between, human limbs sprouted. According to some heroes, despite a neck fracture and cerebrospinal fluid spilling out, they ultimately survived after treatment.]

[…….]

[Is it a creation of Councilman Takas?]

In a place where eyes and expressions could not be seen, one could feel consciousness suddenly focusing on one spot. It felt as though the four council members, including Chei, were gazing at Takas.

Hearing that, Takas cautiously spoke.

[I have received the report. I approved it when it was stated to be like that. But I didn’t think it would turn out this way. The initial report stated that the body was already undergoing a transformation into a monster from the start.]

[What does that mean?]

[It means that the body was originally like that from the moment they were drawn to the monster. I am confident that what happened to that student’s body has no relation to our actions.]

Thus, the conversation continued.

At the end, Agnol asked suspiciously.

[Wait a minute, that name sounds familiar from previous reports…]

Chei remarked disdainfully.

[It’s the same person. Is it too much to remember issues that have come up before?]

[Are issues discussed only in these meetings? How many things are there to remember!]

[Enough, enough.]

Takas restrained Agnol, who was about to flare up again in this meeting.

[So ultimately, it’s come to this loop again, hasn’t it?]

[What are you going to do?]

Karva spoke up.

[If monsters are aiding the walls’ destruction regardless of their intentions, wouldn’t the right choice be to let that child outside the walls? Honestly, it wouldn’t look good, but to prevent more casualties, I think that would be the best course of action.]

The councilors pondered this countless times.

The feeling of having to push one person out felt unpleasant; however, if it meant saving hundreds or thousands of lives, they believed it was a meaningful action.

Of course, they could also imagine that the aftermath wouldn’t be merely pleasant.

But what could they do? If it meant being called a murderer and stepping down from the position, they would do it if it saved thousands of lives; that would be the best choice.

Then Chei asked, almost aghast.

[But if the transformation into a monster allows them to break down the walls, isn’t it uncertain whether there’s a correlation?]

[The very act of doubting is the problem; that is the sprout of anxiety!]

[It’s right to cut off the sprout of anxiety, but if you do it that way, you won’t be able to farm at all.]

Chei said to Agnol’s agitated voice, calmly.

[If you are scared of bugs eating rice to the point of not farming at all, then you wouldn’t have the ability to farm.]

After saying this, Takas posed a question.

[Then, how would you react if it turns out there is a connection? What decision would you make, Councilor Chei?]

Takas directed the question to Chei. Everyone fell silent, waiting to hear Chei's answer.

Being in charge of the academy, they must have been curious about how to respond regarding the student.

Chei was aware of this, pondering the opinions in his mind.

He had to choose carefully.

Would he sacrifice thousands of people who might d*e like disasters or accidents caused by those monsters,

or would he, not wishing for it, expel one individual in order to achieve peace in the world, to stop those monsters causing disasters or accidents?

Ultimately, what mattered most was the outcome.

Of course, the process was important, but those who died would not return.

[If there is a connection, then as Agnol said, we must cut them off.]

If one was so afraid of bugs that they couldn't cultivate, it would be better to quit farming entirely. However, they needed to fear the spark that could burn the perfectly ripened rice.

Peace? Stability? They prioritized the survival of far more people than that.

Believing that their choice would be beneficial for humanity, the meeting concluded.

Ch. 104 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 104

I became the last place in the academy.

Leaving behind the position of top student and falling to the bottom, my situation didn’t change that much.

Having maintained the top student status consistently, I still managed to score zero on the written exam despite guessing, and in the practical exam, I barely avoided being swallowed by a monster, so it seemed everyone was hesitant to say anything recklessly.

Watching this situation, I wasn’t sure whether to laugh or cry.

Nevertheless, I had created the situation I desired for now.

The other students couldn’t say anything to me, the one in last place, and everyone was busy observing each other.

While they might have looked at the other last-place students with strange eyes, the report card indicated that I was the one in last place, so they couldn’t cast weird glances at others.

It was only natural to wonder what on earth someone who once held the top position was doing like this.

Students being students, I hoped the teachers would also engage in discussions about it.

I wished for some stirring within the Hero Association as well.

Had it happened as I hoped? I couldn’t know anything since there was no information coming to me about what the teachers were saying in front of me.

All I could do was stand here and quietly wait.

Strange sounds might come out.

But I wanted to fulfill my duty.

It wasn’t that Teacher Lucia’s words were wrong.

If one truly wants to change something, it would be sufficient to endure for a while, establishing oneself, and then change things to the extent one has the ability and can take on the responsibility.

However, the way the teacher spoke was too methodical and orthodox, and it consumed too much time to reach that point.

By then, would Kanna even exist? If the time I had to endure included the time rejecting Kanna, how was I supposed to endure that?

I wouldn’t be able to withstand it. I couldn’t possibly endure it.

So ultimately, I couldn’t walk the path the teacher spoke of.

Even if I had to become a martyr, I had to choose this path.

While I was still young, hearing adults or other heroes call me childish and foolish,

When they said it was not something I could take responsibility for, that it was too burdensome for me,

I was determined to endure and somehow protect what was important.

Everyone was so busy seeking stability that they forgot the approaching strange circumstances, only thinking about pushing them away.

Even though these were things that could be understood with a little conversation, they tried to drive it away under the pretense that walls could be broken.

Of course, I couldn’t say I didn’t understand.

If the walls were broken, and the people living inside were dying by thousands before my eyes, wouldn’t I want to fill that void?

I too had a desire to stop the innocent people before me, those who were neither heroes nor awakened ones, from dying helplessly.

If there were no relationships after cutting everything off, and if the monsters intended to continue entering,

Then isn’t cutting away Kanna a bit too excessive?

From the perspective of those contemplating which side would bring them more peace, it could be considered a reasonable judgment, I thought.

It was good to think about it, and I could understand them, but I couldn’t accept it myself.

I even disliked the effort to try to accept it.

I was ready to accept even if they called it biased thinking or narrow-mindedness.

So…

“Just hold on a little longer.”

I murmured like that.

Each time I saw Kanna quietly sleeping next to me, my heart ached terribly.

In the dark space, watching Kanna as she breathed softly, I was filled with questions.

I thought I would try to change the atmosphere within the academy like this, but after actually trying, I questioned whether it would go well.

I hadn’t completely ignored it, but I worried that things would flow differently from what I wished and what I had imagined.

“… Sigh.”

I exhaled softly.

The brightly shining stars beyond the dark sky merely twinkled, not giving me any answers.

I could do nothing but quietly observe and follow along aimlessly, or randomly place marks.

With a vacant gaze, I clenched my fist tightly.

Then, I settled down quietly next to Kanna and lay down.

I shut my eyes gently and took small breaths.

When you come to your senses, when you return to the academy, I wish the environment surrounding you has changed.

I longed to see you without the label of last place hidden behind it.

I prayed earnestly.

*

The heroes within the barrier were civil servants who received taxes for their work.

There were even jokes about heroes having a secure job since they could live comfortably as long as monsters didn’t break through the barrier.

It was a joke, but I already knew that.

It was a job that wouldn’t get you fired, just getting through each day.

Unlike the notion of protecting people’s lives, the longer the years passed without doing anything, people’s feelings began to grow a bit strange.

Then, would it be better if I became an Awakened One and tried to become a hero?

Many entered with such casual thoughts.

Limited space created limited resources.

With limited job opportunities, food, places to live, and so on, Awakened Ones were given the enticing option of becoming a hero.

Thus, once in a while, a chance with a probability that barely appeared for ten people became an opportunity worth hoping for.

Anyway, as the days surrounded by peace extended, people’s tension loosened, and they began to grow complacent, it was inevitable that some would start to wonder about the reason behind these happenings.

In fact, there was now a generation that had only experienced the stories of monsters and heroes through books, making heroes no longer revered beings.

They were seen merely as stable work. With money or benefits, and even if they handled a few trivial tasks assigned to them, they were thought to enjoy ample free time in a comfortable job.

Thus, not every student gathering in the academy had a sense of mission about attending here.

Some came for money, and others for power.

Consequently, those who were not performing well academically or did not possess outstanding abilities and efforts were often disregarded by those sincerely wishing to become heroes.

Knowing this well, they mostly pretended to work hard or acted as if they made an effort, avoiding any potential for being scorned.

Perhaps that’s why Kanna Aurora was the perfect bait for them.

To be honest, I didn’t care what happened. I wasn’t interested in what she had come for.

Whether it was a sense of mission, family safety, money, or power, it was none of my business.

To those who came seeking stability and a secure job for wealth and power, Kanna served as a good shield, enabling them to live comfortably.

Of course, being in the lower tier, they couldn’t avoid those gazes completely, but since there was no need to remember who was in the lower tier, most managed to blend in.

Therefore, they hoped Kanna Aurora would continue to remain in last place.

However, Kanna Aurora eventually stopped coming to the academy, and the position of last place was taken over by Yoon Hamin.

I couldn’t understand what she was doing that for, but I had to be flustered.

Even though Kanna Aurora had a practical score of zero, she was already producing grades that would allow her to escape last place. Now Yoon Hamin had actually entered the spot in last place, and I didn’t know what to do.

Since he had been the top student, I couldn’t just point fingers, asserting that he was just like Kanna Aurora playing unfairly, that he was really there

for the money, and seeing he wasn’t studying or putting in effort, it would be easy to assume he was simply trying to live off the security of the job.

A strange current began to flow within the academy.

While I didn’t know how the teachers felt, there was already a hushed atmosphere among the students.

The upper-tier students wondered why someone who held the position of a top student would abandon it and fall to this state.

Some simply rejoiced at raising their rank by one place, but those like Orca did not take it lightly.

Middle-tier students tilted their heads in confusion, and lower-tier students shrugged it off. After all, they thought it had no meaning even if their rank went up by one.

As students from the upper tier and those without a mission started to stir, even the middle-tier and lower-tier students began to feel something was a bit off.

And that atmosphere eventually reached the teachers.

With each passing day, there were individuals at the academy questioning why this was happening and spreading the word further.

And that story grew and grew, eventually becoming an enormous issue.

“… Please clarify, Teacher Lucia.”

The homeroom teacher, Lucia, hung her head low and muttered.

“I’m sorry, Vice Principal. I have no excuse.”

Ch. 105 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 105

At the Academy, there were many rumors circulating, but none were as significant as Yoon Hamin, the top student, coming in last place.

As his homeroom teacher, I did tell him that doing such things would only harm him, but I couldn’t completely absolve myself of responsibility for not stopping his actions.

Even if it was an impulsive act that couldn’t be prevented, there would inevitably be voices questioning why such an impulsive act was allowed to happen, so I was preparing myself mentally to accept that situation.

Just because I was mentally prepared didn’t mean I was okay with anything I heard or that I was indifferent to it.

After being thoroughly lectured by the vice principal, I felt as though I had aged a year.

I let out a sigh of despair as I felt my soul leaving my body.

I knew that a teacher shouldn’t hate students, and that I shouldn’t discriminate or divide them, but I already knew that it was impossible for either the principal or the vice principal to do that.

They only emphasized fairness and equity as a facade, but in reality, they couldn’t help but favor students who appeared to work with a sense of mission, and those who seemed capable of doing better in society as heroes.

That’s why there are significant questions surrounding the fact that a student who was once the top has now fallen to last place.

I felt the same way. That’s why I found Yoon Hamin more frustrating.

If he disliked the atmosphere of the Academy, he should have said something in advance, or if he was going to pull such a stunt, at least he could have given me a hint.

Or perhaps he suddenly acted out of fear that he might be stopped if he spoke to me about it.

My head throbbed.

Even though I managed to cover for him somewhat by explaining that he had been attacked by a monster, the written examination part could not be covered up, and there was nothing I could do about it.

It must be a common occurrence. There must be students like this from time to time.

He might have done something so extreme because he liked Kanna, but isn’t that too hasty a judgment?

It seems to me that it can only be described as a hasty judgment.

The kids who are students now won’t d*e in a few years; their future is still long.

Yet ironically, it is their adolescence that will determine that future.

They are labeled as children, kids, or adolescents because they aren’t mature, yet they are expected to dream about their future as adults at that time, which is unreasonable.

Can’t they dream after they mature?

The Academy was the same. It aimed not to simply conduct education and place heroes in jobs but to find and produce strong heroes who could reassure the people inside the barriers, even more correctly and certainly.

The barriers that had not collapsed for a long time, the people’s waning sense of tension.

Those who knew the fear of monsters had already grown old, yet those old people recalled the fear repeatedly, hoping that future generations would not experience it.

As if there were limits to this, the voices of the elderly diminished, and eventually, the only remnants of that fear became textbooks and history.

It was inevitable.

It was impossible to make someone feel what they hadn’t experienced.

Things that could only be taken lightly if one hadn’t faced them directly couldn’t be prevented.

How could those who live in peace paid for with countless sacrifices know the weight of the sacrifices that were made?

But because of that, they needed to know even more. They needed to awaken.

The monsters had already begun to act, and they were starting to break through the barriers.

To the complacent humanity, to those who hastily concluded that the barriers were peaceful, they needed to overcome the fear that approaches by realizing that they were wrong.

They came to understand what they didn’t know before experiencing it only after going through it.

People became weak in the face of the fear that their friends could vanish at any moment, the sense of loss that came only after family members disappeared, the sorrow of being left with no one but feeling that they, too, would d*e, and thus, heroes rose again from that gap.

But it didn’t mean every hero had to fight against the monsters.

“I have taken over from Council Member Takas, so you will now follow my orders.”

[…Yes.]

Those who received orders from Council Member Takas did not fight the monsters.

They merely had to follow the council member who dreamed of peace within the barriers.

[…Yes, the target is currently residing at Yoon Hamin’s home.]

“Is that so? Is the condition the same as the hospital’s diagnosis?”

[Yes.]

Chei waved the documents he had received from Takas.

Inside, there were already descriptions of documents that Takas had received individually, laid out in an easy-to-understand manner.

It even had Takas’s stamp signifying that approval was complete.

There had been several encounters with the monster. The first case involved a disappearance after contact, the second saw only the Lamiris family’s servants around her d*e, excluding her. The third showed a cooperative attitude after absorbing a totem.

So, limbs were severed on mutual agreement, yet it couldn’t confirm whether the transformation into a monster progressed with just that, and at the same time, to see if the monster was helping break the barriers simply by existing or by having a separate contact network, someone was assigned.

Lastly, the fourth encounter.

This time, while the monster did not come looking for Kanna, she initiated the fight instead, and whether due to an explosion or not, her prosthetic arm

and leg fell off, and new limbs grew.

It was already determined that her body had completed transformation into a monster and could not be stopped.

It was difficult to find the connection between the target, Kanna Aurora, and the monster, so evidence collection continued.

As Chei read through the documents, he asked again.

“Then, there is no separate contact with the monster or anything like that?”

[No, that’s correct. The target is active solely within Yoon Hamin’s home without attending the academy.]

“Understood. Please continue the surveillance.”

Chei cut off communication.

He leaned back in his chair and turned around.

After half a rotation, his worries began anew.

As he looked at the hospital diagnosis, he wondered if there might be falsehoods like bribery involved, but since it seemed genuine, as he was not attending the academy or seeking contact elsewhere, it appeared to be real.

It could also be that they wanted to appear that way.

If only fighting the monsters breaking through the barriers was the problem, life would be much easier.

Having someone who could be in league with the monsters made it that much more troublesome.

He clicked his tongue, but nothing improved.

The same went for council meetings; executing someone based only on intuition was impossible.

At the same time, expelling someone regardless of the greater good felt uncomfortable.

If he were to take action, he needed clear grounds for it.

This could not turn into a witch hunt.

Thus, evidence was essential.

They had sent out limbs only to recover this purpose.

The intention was to lay low until someone encountered the monster, but it appeared that Kanna Aurora had no separate meetings other than opposing the monster.

If she was instructed for personal actions, that could be the case, but the last incident involved a near-fatal accident due to battle, so it was hard to think it was so simple.

"…Takas, that person has touched an innocent student…"

But no, I couldn't make any hasty judgments.

Takas was also a member of the council, so it was better to think he had his reasons for doing such things.

As he was about to let out a deep sigh, a suffocating sound reached his ears.

He received a call through an alarming noise that rang in his ears.

[Sir, I contacted you because I heard you received the transfer from Council Member Takas.]

"Yes, what is it?"

[…I have found out that Yoon Hamin went to the Flica agency to demand a totem.]

Flica, Flica. Reg Pelain?

“Is this information from the President of Reg Pelain?”

[No, it was reported by an employee inside…]

“Alright, understood. I will consider it as not certain for now.”

[For now, I will send the entry information.]

“Yes, please do that.”

Chei tilted his head.

Then, as soon as he saw Yoon Hamin stepping into the Flica agency, his eyes narrowed.

Yoon Hamin and Kanna live together for now.

Yoon Hamin frequents the Flica agency.

Being in cahoots… it seems unlikely given the opponent is Reg Pelain.

If that is the case, perhaps it is Yoon Hamin’s struggle to obtain a totem.

Why does he need a totem?

If he were to receive it, what would he use it for?

It was a matter worthy of enough suspicion.

If that was the truth.

Ch. 106 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 106

Chei rolled the coin.

Having finally read through the files conveyed from Takas, I started receiving information from the individuals I was handed over to, allowing me to learn about the actions and circumstances of a student named Kanna Aurora.

Being in such a high-stakes position where all information converges, there was an overwhelming amount of data to process, making it a headache to remember everything.

However, with a position comes responsibility. Enduring this and carrying out my duties was the very nature of being a council member.

The academy students: Yoon Hamin, Kanna Aurora, and their homeroom teacher, Lucia. Yoon Hamin’s mentoring agency is Flica, while the practical training agency is Arden.

In the research journal detailing amputations, Kanna Aurora was described as being almost a monster.

However, simply being labeled as a body indistinguishable from a monster implies that it is not exactly a monster.

The remaining traits of her body mean that she does not suffer harm from unrefined magical power like a monster would and that she can also draw magical power from within it.

The reasons why she was not definitively stated to be a monster but referred to as a half-monster are twofold:

She was not born that way inherently.

She is too weak compared to traditionally defined monsters.

While she could not be conclusively identified as a monster, the existence of many bothersome traits meant that Chei had to struggle with this dilemma repeatedly.

*

To become an adult, ample time was necessary.

How much time must pass to mature, and what experiences must one undergo to develop a more adult-like demeanor?

What studies must one pursue to deepen their thoughts, and what must one see to foster good ideas? Those remain unanswered questions.

The experiences and lessons one must learn from birth until adulthood vary greatly, making it difficult to establish clear criteria.

Thus, society cannot define those criteria individually, so it delineates adults, teenagers, and children based on age.

What on earth an adult is remains unclear to me.

Even if I think to choose for myself and take responsibility, adults still say, “No, you’re still young; your choices are immature and foolish.”

Everyone may have plausible thoughts, but when it comes to the divide between adults and those who have not yet become one, the adult’s voice always seems louder.

So, does that mean I am still an immature being?

Is my choice simply a momentary act of childishness, lacking maturity, unable to manage future events, and unable to take responsibility for my actions?

That was not true.

Rather, if that were possible, shouldn’t anyone be deemed an adult regardless of age?

I understood what my homeroom teacher wanted to say and what concerns they harbored.

Yet, in this actual situation, the only way I could help Kanna was to ignore those worries and willingly take a difficult path.

I wanted to protect Kanna, but the world only suggested I was powerless and incompetent.

You are too young and lonely to achieve anything by yourself.

In the end, you’ll lose out to overwhelming opinions and be unable to protect Kanna.

It felt like they were saying that, igniting a sense of defiance within me.

I thought about exercising influence in places where it was possible to do so alone, believing that if voices gathered eventually, I could pose significant questions to society.

I wanted my actions not to end as a mere impulsive action of a single student and not to stop at merely expressing grievances.

I had the will to act. I was ready to endure any future pain that might come.

As long as it wasn’t the pain of losing Kanna, as long as it wasn’t the future in which Kanna would shed tears.

The words Kanna once said to me, expressing her wish for my happiness, had come to hinge on the condition that Kanna remain by my side.

So, if I wanted to keep smiling without crying, I wanted to tell her to endure and stay by my side.

That was only possible if Kanna returned to her original self, however.

“Hamin seems to have been spacing out a lot lately.”

“Oh, sorry.”

I snapped back to reality, refocusing after having spaced out.

Then, Kanna, who was eating with me, was quietly looking at me.

“Is something wrong?”

“No, nothing at all…”

“Do we have to go out again this weekend?”

Hearing those words, I tried to remember what I did last week. Then, I recalled going to the Flica agency, wondering if I could ask for a totem to help restore Kanna’s memories.

Boss Reg had only asked straightforward questions and hadn’t handed over the totem, but I trusted he wouldn’t engage in unnecessary talking.

I had hoped that Sel, my senior, would assist, but seeing her sigh in disappointment made me feel even more disappointed as well.

No matter what, there was nothing I could do.

Heroes were aware of the totems and were gradually eliminating them one by one.

A team was formed specifically to search for and eliminate totems.

In such circumstances, there was no way any agency would help obtain a totem without reason or justification.

“I don’t think I will go today.”

I wouldn’t be asking another agency for help.

The safest option was now a useless card. So, to treat Kanna, I had no choice but to find a totem myself.

The area around the expansive, vast barrier was far too large to search alone. On top of that, I had to avoid the attention of heroes, which made it exceedingly difficult.

If I took Kanna with me, I could surely find it more easily, but I didn’t want to put her in danger.

However, if both of us ended up in danger because of my actions, wouldn’t it be better to take Kanna along and swiftly take care of the matter?

“Really? What will you do today then?”

“…How about we do some simple exercise at home?”

“Hmm, sounds good.”

Kanna accepted eagerly.

It didn’t seem sudden since, previously, with her limbs just regenerating, the plan had been for light rehabilitation while moving around.

After clearing away the clanging dishes, I changed into light workout clothes to join Kanna.

Then we went to the yard to stretch.

“Kanna, are you feeling a bit better?”

“Huh?”

“Your arms or anything…”

“I’m fine!”

No matter how much I talked about prosthetic arms or legs, it was something Kanna didn’t even fully recognize about losing her arm, so she brushed it off lightly.

I nodded silently at her nonchalant attitude.

I wanted to tell Kanna that I finished last, but the other kids didn’t scold me for being in last place, so she would be okay, too.

However, the atmosphere felt strange, and I sensed that both the current Kanna and the previous Kanna wouldn’t take such news happily, so I kept silent.

I would proudly say it later when the academy’s atmosphere changed and the gazes cast towards Kanna disappeared.

“First of all, let’s warm up…”

As I murmured that, suddenly there was a knock at the door.

A chill ran down my spine. There shouldn’t be anyone coming to my house, so who could it be?

Neither Orca nor Sel’s absence showed on the device.

“Who is it?”

Kanna tilted her head and turned towards the yard’s gate, while I hesitantly reached out my arm to her.

“Kanna, stay inside.”

“Uh, eh?”

“Hurry.”

“Oh, okay!”

Hearing my words, Kanna entered the house through the entrance.

I held my racing heart and took a deep breath.

As I carefully approached the firmly closed iron door and opened it, two men dressed in suits stood before me.

“…Who are you?”

I asked nervously, and one of the men opened his mouth stiffly as if he were here for business.

“I came to find Yoon Hamin from Class A of the first year, who lives with Kanna Aurora.”

“…Why are you looking for Kanna?”

His voice indicated he came already knowing well-known information, and I couldn’t help but be on edge.

I was prepared to use any abilities if needed.

The two men didn’t even flinch at my anxiety.

“Not only Kanna Aurora but you are included as well. We need your cooperation since you’ve been going around looking for totems in place of Kanna Aurora.”

“…What?”

Looking for totems? What are they talking about?

“What do you mean, when did I go looking for totems…!”

“Don’t deny it; we already have evidence that you visited the Flica agency last Saturday in an attempt to obtain a totem.”

My mind suddenly felt paralyzed.

How did they know? Surveillance?

Oh, right, it might be surveillance attached to Kanna.

There was no trust from the beginning when they had to amputate her limbs, perhaps they had attached surveillance then.

I had thought too lightly of this. I had assumed it was simply a matter of restoring Kanna’s memories.

Had I been acting too carelessly?

“…Is that so.”

I was so consumed with the thought that Kanna was in pain that I had overlooked this detail.

I admitted that my thinking was short-sighted. It was a painful mistake.

Was it proof that I hadn’t yet become an adult?

Or was it a different issue altogether?

I raised my hand. I pointed at the air with my thumb.

It was nowhere near as light-hearted as before, so I pressed down firmly to engrave a star similar to the one before.

“Yet, I still can’t go. I won’t let Kanna be sent away.”

“Give it up, you can’t do anything alone.”

Why did I need help from others to protect Kanna?

Please, just hear me out.

Kanna hasn’t done anything wrong.

Executing her simply for being in danger is exceedingly cruel.

Of course, I didn’t explicitly say execution or anything, but my mind was screaming that if she got sent away like this, that would surely be the outcome.

That’s why I recalled the promise I made to myself back then.

The vow to protect Kanna, even if my abilities weaken, will only grow stronger.

A line connected beyond that point, which was stamped with a ping.

Ch. 107 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 107

It would be nice to have a sword, but there was no weapon prepared at the moment. In a situation where an attack could happen at any moment, there was no choice but to move with just my hands.

The two men in suits in front of me widened their eyes in disbelief after witnessing the activation of my ability.

“Are you really going to do this? All you have to do is go to the association.”

“I already know what happened to Kanna when she did that.”

Shimmering lights and the lines connecting them surrounded me.

These were my spear and shield after completing my readiness.

I could thrust at my opponent as I pleased, and build a defensive line to protect my body.

The atmosphere seemed to make the opponent uneasy. However, they didn’t try to resolve the situation with words at all.

The two men stepped forward cautiously, loosening their hands in the air before addressing me.

“…You seem to be a budding hero, but aren’t you trying to become one?”

“What does being a hero have to do with this?”

“People are just worried about when the Barrier will break down, yet you were about to hand a totem to someone who might actually break that barrier, and you aren’t even cooperating.”

Their expressions grew a bit more hostile.

“Is there something that’s bothering you? You could just have a casual conversation and assert your innocence, couldn’t you?”

“Innocence? I’ve been innocent before…! Even after having my limbs severed, now you want me to claim my innocence? What nonsense…”

The stars flickered brightly. It felt as if something was choking me, as if I was reaching my limit.

If it weren’t for that monster, I would have already pushed people away with the output I had in mind; it was frustrating that I couldn’t.

This situation was all my fault. But what was I supposed to do?

Should I really just let Kanna stay by my side in blissful ignorance, thinking it was okay to remain silent here? That was impossible, and I couldn’t forgive myself for living like that.

The only way to restore Kanna’s memory and ensure her mental stability was through that method.

I didn’t know if the president of Reg reported separately or if the story had leaked out from somewhere, but the only thing I knew for sure was that there was no one I could trust.

In this moment, everything directed towards Kanna felt like an enemy.

I thought that being apart from Kanna itself was a crisis for her, so I moved my body.

“Breaking and entering… doesn’t seem to be effective, and if you move, I will sh**t.”

I felt hostility rising from my throat. The men standing in my yard hesitated, then slightly turned their necks.

It seemed they were preparing to charge at me, so I focused my attention.

There were two opponents, and it was a bit tough to face them alone. They were not ordinary people, they looked like Awakened Ones and were likely direct operatives of the association, making the situation even more difficult.

I contemplated how to make them give up, but the only thought that came to mind was to crush them with force.

How could I force them down when my abilities were restricted? Could I really defeat the two in front of me despite these limitations?

Even though I pondered these questions time after time, I anticipated that there would be no suitable answers, so at the moment they stepped forward, I raised my right hand and swiftly moved to the right.

Flash.

The tiny stars in front of me flickered and shot out like spears at the same time. The light sped by them like bullets.

“…Is the top student really different?”

One man gasped in admiration.

They had only taken one step forward, and I had threatened them with my shot. As a result, the atmosphere that seemed on the verge of bursting cooled down again.

“Please step back and leave.”

“You will really regret this.”

“What will I regret?”

“Kanna Aurora. She’s someone who has faced monsters multiple times alone and is involved in the breaking of the barrier. If she gets expelled with such a stigma, you won’t have a chance to clarify anything afterward.”

I gritted my teeth.

“If you want to clarify, now is the time. If not, the decision of the council members could lead to your expulsion from outside the Barrier.”

Though it sounds nice to say expulsion from outside the Barrier, what’s the difference from saying you’d k*ll a person?

Nothing necessary for survival existed outside. If I were expelled, there was a possibility I would starve to d*ath before encountering a monster or being crushed by a beast.

If I made the wrong choice again, Kanna would d*e.

I wanted to protect her, yet I was faced with questions that had no answers. And the cost of that would be a clash of fates that I couldn’t prevent.

Taking responsibility for choices. If that’s what being an adult means, then I still felt like a child.

Even if I resolved to accept anything and promised to shoulder everything, all that I must endure felt unbearable, painful, and miserable.

If I cooperated, I would just be misunderstood, and if I had to return without Kanna, who would bear that responsibility?

If I didn’t cooperate, and it led to Kanna’s expulsion, then as an accomplice, would I d*e or live treated as a criminal? Who would take that responsibility?

Just because I ended up in jail didn’t mean I took responsibility, so in the end, it was impossible for me to take any.

I hated the people who kept pushing me into a corner, bringing strange endings regardless of which path I chose. I was angry and, hating them, I

lifted my head again.

No. I can’t compromise any longer.

Even if I lacked power, I was determined to resist until I ran out of strength. I couldn’t let Kanna go. I thought that regardless of the path taken, Kanna could be pushed into a pit, so I wanted to avoid choosing either side.

Making a deal with Kanna’s life or compromising were things I couldn’t do, so I stood firm.

“—Step back.”

I opened my eyes wide.

Words didn’t communicate. Neither my words nor theirs. We wanted different things, and negotiations had broken down.

My firm refusal to step back forced them into a combat-ready stance. They hadn’t come armed with weapons, but I hadn’t seen their abilities yet, so I needed to keep a close eye on them.

No, was there really a need to observe?

All I had to do was not allow them to use any cunning tricks.

In that moment of thought, my hands came together. As I aligned my fingers, I formed a triangle.

“d*mn, we can’t communicate.”

The two opponents tried to leap sideways. I glanced left, then right, and then opened my mouth.

“Downpour.”

At that moment, a ring appeared above my head. A crooked ring resembling a wealth of lines woven with shimmering stars.

It expanded in an instant, the lines narrowing before eventually breaking. Stars floated in the air, instantly bursting into light and showering down in a circle around me.

It covered the grass and dirt in the yard, and the downpour made of shooting stars caused them to stop and retreat from using their abilities against me.

“Ugh!!”

Seemingly unable to avoid it entirely, one man, who had been speaking continuously, groaned. Meanwhile, the other man, who had maintained silence until just now, quietly looked at me.

“From now on, I will judge this as disobedience. I will raise the danger level of Kanna Aurora. At the same time, I will consider Yoon Hamin as an accomplice. I strongly recommend prompt surrender.”

“No, I refuse. That doesn’t guarantee my safety.”

“That will be up to the council members to decide.”

So that’s what I refuse. It was what I absolutely disliked, having my limbs severed calmly before.

I loathed it all!

Do you think that by expelling me like this, a monster wouldn’t fully invade? Was it because Kanna was there that history books recorded those invasions?

No, if such beings hadn’t existed, those that were bound to enter would eventually enter anyway.

Ultimately, it’s just a matter of timing, and they’re foolishly seeking peace, throwing a fit to find tranquility of the heart.

I felt like I was going insane. I had a lot to say. But knowing that we couldn’t understand each other made continued conversation meaningless.

After dodging one attack, perhaps thinking it was an opening, one man gritted his teeth and clapped his hands. At the same time, bl**d flowed strangely from him and eventually pooled in his hand.

The shape of the knuckles made of bl**d made me realize he wasn’t wounded by mere incompetence.

He had intentionally sustained injuries without overdoing it to create a wound. Is that what it means?

I felt that my magical power was somewhat lacking. It would be more accurate to say the efficiency wasn’t good. Still, I was determined to give it my all.

“Yoon Hamin, if you surrender and cooperate now, I’ll let you off…!”

“That would be meaningless…!”

With a flash, the light shot toward the opponent’s fist. The opponent slightly turned his head to minimize the sparkles and twisted his waist.

It seemed the punch had some rotation, leading the light projectile to veer slightly and miss.

Even if the punch was tough, I wanted to thwart his ability, but it seemed like a rather solid power.

“Ugh…”

Just as I was about to groan, a sound that froze me reached me.

The opponent’s voice was neither threatening nor attempting to coax me.

It was simply the sound of a door opening that one might normally hear.

The front door creaked open.

“…Ha, I give up!”

Kanna shouted that while watching me fight.

No, like that, you…

“I’ll follow you!”

Not knowing my feelings or perhaps it was up to me to understand Kanna’s heart, she looked at me gently, even as fear displayed on her face.

Ch. 108 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 108

I rushed inside at Yoon Hamin’s words, but no matter how I tried, I could still read the atmosphere.

I felt anxious. I was curious why Yoon Hamin looked so urgent when he let me in, but even as I turned to escape the house, I couldn’t get further from the entrance.

If I just went into my room and hid under the blanket, Hamin would surely solve everything for me. That’s what I wanted to believe.

I believed it. No, I wanted to believe it, but perhaps I couldn’t fully trust it. I couldn’t shake off the anxiety that if something happened to Hamin, what would I do.

Hamin had a fierce expression on his face and told me to go inside the house. How could I feel at ease?

I couldn’t feel at ease. So, hesitating, I leaned against the tightly shut front door and listened closely.

What I could hear was Hamin’s voice, talking with someone.

Just by the atmosphere, I could tell it was a tense situation.

I was curious about what was happening. So I swallowed hard and focused on the sound.

They were looking for me. A stranger was trying to come and fetch me. Even Hamin said to go with them. It was definitely a future different from

what I knew.

Of course, just the fact that I was close to Hamin could be the beginning of a warped future, but as that unknown future came closer, all I felt was worry.

I knew it was natural for people to live without knowing the future, but having seen it once, now it was hard to block it out, and I sighed unconsciously.

And then Hamin apparently refused and a fight began as a loud noise started to come in.

With the noise coming from outside, I slightly recoiled at the entrance, trying to distance myself. Yet, I couldn’t run far because I was probably worried about Hamin.

The destruction of a world unknown to anyone. The d*ath of people known only to me.

I alone knew that this was the end of a tragedy where everyone would d*e. So I desperately wished for the tragedy to turn into a comedy.

I wanted you to smile.

But at this rate, the tragedy would continue as a tragedy, and it seemed like it wouldn’t even take a comedic turn. I didn’t mind, but if I lost Yoon Hamin too, there would be nothing left in the world.

I needed Yoon Hamin. This world needed Yoon Hamin.

I firmly believed that only with that existence could the tragedy be changed.

At that moment, a voice came from beyond the door.

[Yoon Hamin, if you surrender and cooperate now, I will spare you…!]

Ah, Hamin. They said they would spare Hamin if he surrendered now.

I felt restless and rose from my hesitation.

I was scared; without Hamin, I was scared. But the world would be just as scared. The world would fear Hamin disappearing more than me not being there. So, isn't it better for just me to go than for both of us?

I wasn't scared. Maybe it was because I hadn't experienced the things Hamin had told me, but I wasn't scared. I wasn't scared…

Actually, I was scared, but I didn't know why. Being alone in the dark was frightening, but could I endure it? Could I bear it?

Others would feel the same way. So, I—

"I-I'll surrender! I'll go with you!"

I opened the door and shouted like that.

Hamin, you fought for me, right? I'm sorry. But if it goes on like this, it will be dangerous for both of us. I'm sorry for getting you involved. I'm sorry.

I shouldn't have even pretended to know, I just wanted to let you live peaceful days, I'm sorry. I must have been a fool before. I had no knowledge. I didn't even understand why I made that choice.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

It's all my fault. It happened because of me, but there's no need for Yoon Hamin to be in danger too. You desperately protected me, right? Thank you.

There were so many things I wanted to say, but I couldn't do it at that moment. No matter how much I wanted to throw a tantrum, I couldn't afford to do that in this situation.

So I hesitantly moved forward.

Stay alive. Smile for me. That's how we save the world. Become a star. Be the compass that shines in this dark space. So that people won't be scared in the dark night like I am.

“…What?”

Strangers looked at me with blank expressions. I hesitated as I looked at them, but I didn’t stop my steps.

“…I’ll go with you. I just need to go, right?”

“But we need to take this guy too—”

The men insisted on taking Yoon Hamin along, and he looked like he was struggling and even sent me a glance that seemed to ask me to persuade them.

Seeing that Hamin, I quietly urged,

“It’s alright now.”

Hamin.

“You and I, now we have nothing to do with each other.”

I’m sorry.

I gently pushed Yoon Hamin’s chest. Looking at Hamin being pushed back weakly hurt my heart. I pushed weakly, but it felt like my heart was tearing apart.

Is this the right thing? No, even before I lost my memory, even in that lost time, I wouldn’t have made such a choice. This feeling wouldn’t fade in just three months.

This desire to ensure Yoon Hamin’s happy ending wouldn’t just lightly disappear.

So I won’t regret it.

“Wait, we need to take Yoon Hamin too!”

Someone shouted like that, but I sensed the mood and spoke as calmly as I could.

“I’m sorry. I made it happen on purpose.”

“What?”

“I’m using my ability to make them follow me.”

“…Huh?”

I thought this was the only way to save Hamin.

“What are you talking about…! Kanna!”

Hamin grabbed me, but I opened my mouth without caring.

“Take me if you want. I don’t know how to turn back either.”

Even if they had to take me with them, I opened my mouth so that Yoon Hamin could quietly return to society. The two men nodded, though they seemed unsure.

“Well then, come with us both for now.”

Their sharp demeanor toward Hamin had somewhat softened.

In contrast, Hamin looked at me with a disappointed expression.

Perhaps he saw the actions I took as the opposite of his efforts as something unlikable. But what could I do? Standing alone and enduring in this world wouldn’t be something even most people could bear.

No matter how much power the stars had, there would ultimately be a limit to enduring alone.

“…Yes.”

I didn’t look back at Hamin.

Goodbye, Yoon Hamin.

Once you part ways, move forward like this. I’m sorry.

I’m sorry for saying I was scared and asking you to sleep together, taking up a corner of the bed. I’m sorry for whining that I wanted to go to the academy with you. I’m sorry for insisting you shouldn’t leave even though you probably wanted to be alone on the weekend.

I feel foolish. I was filled with things to apologize for.

But I couldn’t say those words. I was scared that if I did, it would drag me into trouble.

Take care.

“Kanna!”

Leaving behind that shout, I got into a different car than Yoon Hamin’s.

*

A desolate, dark room.

The black glass that wouldn’t allow looking outside seemed coated so that it could only be viewed from the outside in.

Sitting at a distance from the door with a table in between, I stared blankly.

What had I done wrong? I couldn’t comprehend why Kanna did what she did, nor why she said those words.

I had vowed to protect, even bringing out my powers against others, so why?

Questions arose, but ultimately I had no answers to deduce on my own.

I just sat idly, and when someone came in, I gazed at them absentmindedly.

A different person entered through the door than the one who came to fetch me and knocked on the door lightly. Then they locked the door from the outside and sat down across from me at the table.

“Are you Yoon Hamin?”

“…Yes.”

“Yeah, I went to fetch you from the association, but you resisted fiercely, right?”

“……”

Silence enveloped us, and he glanced at the file he brought before trying to ease the atmosphere with conversation.

“I don’t mean to say anything specific. If I were in your shoes, I might have defended my girlfriend too if she faced something like that.”

But such words did nothing to ease my heart. I didn’t even have a girlfriend in the first place.

As I kept my mouth tightly closed, fear rose in me, clenching my fists.

“Um, what’s going to happen to Kanna? Kanna… you’re not going to drive her outside the barrier or anything, right? Are you?”

“Oh dear, this is serious. You don’t think it’s all a lie, caring for her like that?”

Hearing that, I felt my head go hazy.

What does he mean, calling it a lie to care for someone? Does he think my feelings for Kanna are fake?

“What are you saying?”

I asked back in disbelief, and he looked at me calmly.

“Is this what you think of as love, caring for her so much right now?”

I could only stare in silence, and he took that silence as his time.

“I understand Kanna Aurora’s ability is electric, right? It’s been proven to even handle slight electric currents. Moreover, she managed to block that unrefined magical power explosion with fine control before.”

“…And?”

“Don’t you think that it’s her ability that forced your heart to keep beating?”

What nonsense.

“Kanna Aurora herself acknowledged that she did that to use you. Of course, it sounds pretty cheap, but I came here thinking there might be some truth to it.”

“W-Wait a minute. That can’t be true…!”

“People don’t know well. Even if they don’t realize it, if their heart keeps racing, they can get confused about what emotion that brings. Even without her abilities, as a girl, she might have simply felt that way, right?”

My teeth clenched.

“That can’t be!”

I shouted like that, but he just looked at me with an expression that seemed to say, ‘that’s probably true,’ as he had seemingly already reached his conclusion halfway through.

Ch. 109 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 109

The investigation into Kanna Aurora began before Yoon Hamin's. No matter how deep Yoon Hamin went, he was merely a supporter, and the fundamental issue was Kanna Aurora.

Kanna hesitated in the investigation room, glancing around nervously.

However, she clearly displayed a different demeanor than those who were attempting to calm themselves with deep breaths. She seemed anxious, her gaze darting around, unable to keep her hands still.

While it was understandable to behave that way upon arriving here, such actions were merely bothersome since the investigation needed to begin.

The world had been excessively peaceful for a long time.

In places people did not know, the monsters had established their own villages and paused their anger for a moment. They temporarily halted their expressions of rage toward those who had expelled their kin and spent time living their own lives.

Thanks to that, the people inside the barrier found peace and stability, which in turn allowed them to live comfortably.

The younger generation had only seen monsters in books. Even the middle generation was not much different.

Only those in the older generation, now retired due to age, might have spoken of events they had experienced in their youth.

Such complacency applied not just to other heroes but also to those in power.

They thought that after getting angry once or twice like before, it would stop, or that if they cut it off once, it would be resolved on its own. After handling the monsters up to this extent, they believed it would no longer continue.

They lived comfortably, finding solace in past precedents.

The problem was that the monsters of that time were different from those now, and that this time, the monsters had no intention of stopping, but would people even know that?

After all, no one but Kanna understood that destruction would come to this barrier, so what could they possibly know about the future?

They only thought about covering the eyes of others to maintain the peace laid out before them. They believed that peace would return once again as it had before.

What could be done even if their thinking was short-sighted? A generation had already been skipped. All those who could adequately deal with the monsters had retired, and those who needed to take action expected it to end while looking for precedents.

“Kanna Aurora. Yoon Hamin tried to retrieve a totem for you. What were you planning to do with the totem?”

Whether Kanna Aurora had suspicions or not was not important. The critical point was that this being was clearly recognized by the monsters and seemed to cause them to break the barrier multiple times, which made her someone they wanted to exclude.

If Kanna were to disappear and the collapse of the barrier were to slow down, nothing could be more desired.

Kanna hesitated but then bowed her head deeply. Although her expression suggested she was hearing it for the first time, she soon opened her mouth, indicating that was not the case.

“…I, I wanted to be healed…”

Kanna responded like that.

While it was partly because Yoon Hamin said he wanted to return her to her original self, it was more about wanting to keep Yoon Hamin away from getting entangled in such matters.

Kanna thought about saying that it was all her doing, that she deliberately approached Yoon Hamin to manipulate him.

She only needed to say what she had to say to be believed.

Yoon Hamin would be with Orca, but she thought it didn’t matter whether he truly cared about her or not.

She believed that once she said it, they would see it through tinted glasses, and the impression would be that Yoon Hamin was actually the victim.

“Then it’s not Yoon Hamin’s voluntary action; it’s your command, Miss Kanna, correct?”

“…Yes.”

Kanna intentionally paused her words.

Even if her thoughts had become short, there was no issue in lying. Naturally nodding, Kanna then kept her mouth shut.

In this situation, if it was said to be related to monsters, she would be sent away, but as it stood, being uncertain meant there was no immediate threat toward Kanna.

She had merely asked for a totem to heal her own body. That was all there was to it.

Thus, they had no choice but to bring up another story.

Even if she had tried to use Yoon Hamin, it was still within the realm of understanding, so she intended to broach a topic that the higher-ups of the association might accept.

“What did you feel when the monster made contact with you, Miss Kanna?”

“Uh? Th-that, um… it was just like that.”

Kanna, perplexed upon hearing a question about something she never considered, answered vaguely after determining that it was indeed a past event.

The questioner sensed something strange. However, not knowing exactly what it was, he subtly set a trap and asked further.

“Then what did you do when you encountered the monster for the second time? Do you remember the situation?”

“…That… um…”

“Miss Kanna, please answer honestly.”

“Ah, yes. So…”

Kanna struggled with the prompt but realized that there were limits to answering things she couldn’t remember, and ultimately fell silent.

Her heart raced heavily. It was a tense moment where anxiety constricted her chest. Kanna thought about whether it was wrong for Yoon Hamin to be upset due to her.

The questioner flipped through the files for a moment, glanced at the hospital documents attached at the back, and nodded.

“You don’t remember.”

“…I’m sorry.”

Feeling like her attempt to evade the question had been caught, Kanna bowed her head deeply.

She was worried that something might go wrong, so she pondered for quite a while.

In contrast, the staff merely confirmed that the documents were not forged and then rolled the pen, thinking about handing the matter over to someone else.

“That can happen. However, if you try to evade like that, it will only make you more suspicious.”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry.”

“I hope you can speak without hiding anything from now on.”

“Yes, yes! I’ll do that from now on…!”

“Then I’ll have another staff member guide you, so you can follow them.”

“Understood.”

Kanna expressed her gratitude to the one who had offered her advice and turned to leave.

This time, there was a much larger person.

As Kanna followed that person, she soon caught sight of a peculiar door. In the stark white space, following a white line led to a small solitary confinement cell.

Kanna hesitated upon seeing this.

“…Ugh.”

When she let out a small groan, the staff member who was walking ahead turned slightly to look at Kanna.

“Is something wrong?”

“Ah, no… I just feel, uneasy…”

“Having come this far, it’s better to resolve any doubts you have.”

Kanna knew that, but she simply disliked the inexplicable fear that enveloped her body. It was like being afraid of being alone on an otherwise ordinary night.

But as she heard that from ahead, Kanna, unable to stop, began to follow behind, clutching her own trembling body.

“Rest for a moment, then follow the guidance announcements.”

“Ah, th-thank you.”

Kanna said this and stepped into the solitary confinement assigned to her. The pure white space, the bright white light, and within it, Kanna cautiously sat on the bed provided for her.

Kanna thought of Yoon Hamin.

She felt worried that he had come to such a place because of her, and there was also guilt.

If she had her memories, she might not have gone this far, but she recalled that the reason there was no memory was due to her own actions that brought about this situation.

How could she return everything to its original state?

Kanna, burdened with that concern, laid back on the bed and squeezed her eyes shut. She placed the pillow next to her head and laid her hand on top of it.

She began to recall what she knew.

Kanna Aurora was not a character of significant importance in the story anyway. All that was mentioned was that she had the lowest grades, and her appearance was so vague that she barely remembered if it even existed.

Such a being would unknowingly d*e swept away by the deaths of her classmates during a crisis around the middle of the story.

In short, she was an entity that could either exist or not.

She wanted to be of use at least once, but was that too far-fetched of a dream for her? Did she simply wish to change the story's ending, only to realize that it was just a dream for her?

Or was it that even if the ending changed, she was fated never to see it?

If she were to d*e here, but Yoon Hamin could smile because of it, if someone assured her that the end of this story would be a happy ending, she would gladly give up her life.

"—Ah."

Although Kanna wanted to send a farewell deep within, she still wanted to see Yoon Hamin.

She wished to tell him that he, the protagonist, had given her so much support and strength.

But that dream remained unfulfilled as the white walls disconnected her from him.

As she let out a small groan, a stiff voice came over the speaker.

[Kanna Aurora, please proceed to the end through the line designated for you.]

Kanna stepped forward, not knowing what awaited her at the end.

Ch. 110 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 110

An unnatural pure white space. I blankly looked around.

A neat row of pure white lights on the white ceiling pointed the way.

A long sticker that I could only guess where it would lead me.

Uneasiness crept up. I didn’t know why I felt so bad, but I just disliked it.

Hamin had tried to get a totem for me, and now this had happened. If Hamin were to go through something like this, wouldn’t he end up disliking me?

I had various worries, but I was so scared right now that I couldn’t think deeply.

Well, I had said goodbye, so it seemed like I wouldn’t be able to meet Hamin again.

At least, back when they said it, ‘Hamin’ might be excusable. So, it probably meant there was no answer for someone like me.

Still, coming to a place like this and having the chance to meet Yoon Hamin and talk to Orca was an experience that could be considered unique…

I didn’t want to d*e, but I also didn’t want to be chased away or anything like that. If everyone hated me, there was nothing I could do.

The situation had changed, and if even the one who should d*e in such circumstances didn’t d*e, I might have to accept it.

…In fact, I couldn’t accept d*ath like that.

I couldn’t think of it as fate and just accept it.

In the end, what I could accept was that this way, only I could d*e.

It’s okay even if I’m lonely. It seemed like I was supposed to d*e alone anyway.

Honestly, whether everyone ends up dying isn’t my concern, but I couldn’t just sit idly by if Hamin were to d*e or if his surroundings were to end up dying too.

I had kept that in my heart, and now that I had come this far, it was the right thing to act on it, right?

Hmm, I don’t know. I’m scared.

In fact, I wished someone would save me.

I didn’t want to be in a place like this. I just wanted to spend my daily life with Hamin.

That said, I didn’t want to keep worrying people.

What should I do? How can I make Hamin like me?

If I had known it would be like this, I should have asked Orca what she liked and found out.

I had a lot on my mind, but on the contrary, the path soon reached its end.

The scenery beyond the door prepared for me was not pleasant.

Not only was it not my taste, but it was also uncomfortable as there was nothing but a chair.

[Please enter and take a seat.]

A voice leaked from the speaker placed in the corner.

Is there a camera set up somewhere watching me?

I raised my head, and above what seemed to be just pure white walls, there were black glass panels filling what seemed like a 2nd floor.

Was this space designed to be easily seen from that high floor?

It was frustrating since I couldn’t see the other side from this side.

But surely, I couldn’t complain about that now, could I?

Sitting cautiously in the metal chair, I glanced around timidly.

When I thought that someone was watching me alone in an unknown place, I wanted to run away at that very moment.

Was what Hamin had said, trying to keep me out of trouble, working here? If so, that was a bit scary.

What on earth were they calling me here for?

[Kanna Aurora, do you not have any memories from the time of the incidents in March until the end of May?]

“…Uh, um, yes…”

I wondered if my voice could be heard.

Without any concern, an answer returned.

[I see. Then we will proceed with the treatment methods that Yoon Hamin was attempting.]

“Eh?”

I lifted my head.

And turned it again.

There was another door apart from the one I entered.

That door creaked open, and a group came in, leading strange machines behind them.

I wondered what they were, but it seemed they had no intention of explaining it to me.

Instead, the machines began to surround me, sitting in the chair.

[Please lie down on the bed.]

“……Huh, um, may I ask what you are doing?”

[Given the current situation, we have determined that we cannot ascertain what has happened so far or what you have been thinking. We will prioritize treatment.]

In such an atmosphere, I wondered if they would even give me a proper answer, but surprisingly, they answered readily.

Certainly, I didn’t have memories of that moment.

However, the fact that I didn’t have those memories didn’t make me feel disconnected, so it didn’t bother me, and I was able to get by without any issues.

But just like Hamin, the people of this place were looking for me after I regained my memory.

I didn’t know if it was because I had lost my memory, but I was still skeptical about the idea of regaining memories.

But it was dangerous right now. I had no choice but to cooperate since I didn’t know what might happen.

Following their words, I took off my shoes and carefully got onto the bed, and people wearing protective suits, with only their eyes visible, restrained my limbs with belts attached to the bed.

“Ugh, wait a minute… What, why is this happening?”

I asked in shock, but they offered no response.

It felt like I couldn’t even have a conversation with them, which was quite bothersome.

Say something. I’m scared. I want to run away.

But my limbs were tied, making it impossible to escape.

In fact, even if I had my limbs, I wouldn’t be able to escape from this place.

[Injecting the totem. We will confirm whether your mind returns fully, just like when your limbs were regenerated.]

At that moment, a huge glass tank was brought beside me.

The tank appeared to be about 50cm in diameter, and at its end, a hose was connected, inside which the totem was divided into five layers for sequential release.

I was wide-eyed, realizing that the totem Hamin had tried to get was so easily found.

[Proceed.]

And at that moment, I heard the sound of something activating.

A needle at the end of the hose connected to the glass tank moved, and the totem inside began to tremble, flowing down the hose and shooting into my body.

The solid matter quickly turned into a mass of magical power and vaporized, which was then absorbed into my body.

“Ugh. Huh!”

My body shook.

I felt dazed from the sudden injection of magical power.

No, it was the unfamiliar sensation since I hadn’t felt such power in a long time.

In a confusing mix of familiarity and strangeness, I bit my teeth and moved my body.

Despite the shaking, I felt the pair of eyes watching my condition from inside the protective suits were coldly indifferent.

But I felt too good to say I disliked it.

Was it a sensation I hadn’t known while living in a state where my magical power had run dry? Anyway, I could feel something flowing around me.

Suddenly, I felt a sharp pain in my head.

“Ugh, what?”

My brow instinctively furrowed.

Since I wasn’t allowed to curl up or hold my head, I started to move more violently.

No, no, wait, my head feels strange.

I feel like a person is becoming strange. I feel too light-headed.

I wanted to say so much, but only strange, dazed sounds leaked from my mouth.

[Second one.]

As soon as the words left, I felt a strange atmosphere pressing down on me.

Don’t do this. Don’t!

“Ugh, ugh!”

The moment I moved, the magical power exploded and surged up.

It felt like electric current leaked from my forehead, flowing along with my will.

Sizzling, crackling, a violet electric current appeared at the edge of my vision, making it difficult for those in protective suits to approach easily.

I looked at it but couldn’t feel any emotions regarding it.

No, ah, please take it away quickly. My head feels strange.

It seems like I’m seeing something weird—

*

It was a studio room I had never seen before. In that place, I first realized that I was Kanna Aurora.

What was that? I thought, but there was no one to tell me the answer, so I had to find it on my own.

And surprisingly, the answer was not far away.

Neatly prepared school uniform. And a pamphlet.

Once I headed to the academy, I saw the protagonist’s name and face, along with the heroine Orca who stood by her side.

Only then did I realize I was in the accursed novel that suddenly twisted into tragedy.

I clearly seemed to have died, yet suddenly ended up in a place like this. I must have really liked the novel and at the same time had some bitterness towards it.

Even now, I was thinking it might just be a fleeting fantasy.

At that moment, I instinctively thought that spending time as a student at the academy might not be enough.

What should I do first? Is it really the right thing to get close to Yoon Hamin?

Was it really the right choice for Kanna Aurora, who had no relationship in the original story, to approach Yoon Hamin?

So, I thought that since I still had plenty of time, I would keep an eye on things for now.

The problem was the exam.

Kanna Aurora was in last place, but I didn’t need to be in last place too.

Of course, I had no intention of aiming for the top student position…

There was a time when I had such thoughts too.

The moment I faced my first exam, I immediately quit.

My practical skills were terrible, and so were my written skills.

They said studying should be enough, but keeping up with history, which had already solidified as common knowledge, was too overwhelming for me.

The history I knew was entirely from the novel I was in.

Ordinary things like King Sejong or Admiral Yi were nonexistent,

and they were reciting names of great figures, so even following the common knowledge of this place was the first step.

Starting off in last place was absurd, and I slowly became isolated.

Even though I hadn’t wished for it.

Ch. 111 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 111

The atmosphere of the academy was slightly heavy.

Upper-tier students fiercely competed to get into better agencies, while middle-tier students anxiously sought opportunities to rise into the upper tier while trying not to fall into the lower tier, and to prevent those below them from overtaking them.

And the lower-tier students, including myself, were busy focusing on academics, insisting that we could not let things stay this way.

Since it was still the first exam and another one was coming up next week, the score report had little impact on the rankings. Because of that, we were desperate.

In such an environment, I felt as if I were the only one excluded.

There were gazes that looked at me as if I were destined to be the last place.

But I couldn’t argue against that.

If it were subjects like Korean or math, I could cover up to some extent, but seeing my dismal history score left me speechless. It felt as if I wasn’t even considered a person due to my history score being at rock bottom.

It felt like the disdainful looks given to someone who only came to get a stable job as a civil servant, and it was a bit hard to endure.

I didn’t even expect simple questions like “Who created Hangul?” or “Who defended the country from invaders?”

But here, there were no such figures as King Sejong or Admiral Yi Sun-sin. In fact, there was no history at all, not even the Joseon era, the Three Kingdoms period, or any earlier history.

What was common knowledge to me was stuff I was hearing for the first time, and questions I was encountering for the first time became history lessons they were naturally acquainted with since birth.

The starting lines were different.

I felt like I might just give up looking at a different starting line without even realizing it.

After all, the character Kanna Aurora was not only an unnoticed last place but also someone who would live an insignificant life and exit quietly along with everyone else, so I thought about just quitting.

In the span of a week, I devoted myself to studying history.

Time was unkind and flowed too quickly, making it almost impossible to study the entirety of this place’s history within a week. Although I could memorize the textbook material somehow, the informal questions, which were not in the textbook, were things I hadn’t learned about, so I often missed them.

There was no need to mention my practical skills; they had hit rock bottom too, so I once again took the last place.

An aspiring hero who knows nothing about history. Because of that, the gazes directed at me were not particularly kind.

In the end, I wondered if I should just accept it.

Would I have done something if I had more time? No, I would have still messed up in practice.

Both the body techniques and the ability tests were all fails.

As I exhaled such a sigh, what came flying towards me were cold gazes, eyes that seemed to mock me.

They were looking at me as the last place who got every history question wrong from the start, and they judged that I would certainly continue to be the last.

Even the dining area was usually crowded or, if I found an empty seat, it was too burdensome to sit alone.

“…Hmm.”

One time, when I tried to sit in a corner of the cafeteria to eat, there was a moment when six empty seats were available, and six people suddenly rushed in giving me side-eyes.

Because of that, I couldn’t bring myself to go to the cafeteria afterward.

“You came to earn a living with an ability that won’t work anyway, right?”

After hearing that, I felt so unfair that I couldn’t go to the cafeteria.

One day I even skipped lunch while searching for a place to eat alone, and another day I ended up munching on bread from the snack bar.

There was even a time when, while I was eating bread, a crowd hurried over, and I had to flee my spot.

Eventually, after I finally found a place to eat without receiving anyone’s gaze, my heart had grown cold.

Even if it’s a hero, ultimately it changes with time.

Since it’s a profession that saves people, it’s natural to lack the ability.

Could I somehow endure without going to the academy? No, I have no idea what to do in a place like this.

The facilities were good, so the restroom didn’t smell.

Occupying one stall alone meant no one would enter, making it cozy.

Although I had never eaten here, I was so hungry that I had to be grateful for this place now.

Feeling more pathetic as I became increasingly humble due to being cornered was unavoidable.

As I crunched on bread with a rustling sound, tears began to well up.

I couldn’t understand why I had to be in a place like this, doing so much.

The soggy, salty piece of bread I held in my mouth tasted terrible.

Being lonely was bearable, but encountering disdain and contempt felt like it might drive a person mad.

“Just pretend you don’t know me. Just leave me alone about what I do.”

I’m sorry, I don’t know the history of this place.

Just forgive me for merely reading this world like a pastime.

I only read this place from the protagonist’s perspective; I don’t really know much.

Many words welled up in my throat, but I couldn’t say anything.

I couldn’t even tell if it would work or not.

Time continued to pass. The collapse of the barrier signaling the start of an academy story was nearing.

During that time, all I did was study, find a place to eat bread, and eat while crying.

I had no friends, and there was nowhere to ask for help, making it only tormenting.

I certainly needed to ask for help, but I had to twist this story somehow.

In the end, it was flowing just as the original work went.

No matter how much I struggled, I would simply remain in last place like in the original, and Yoon Hamin would achieve top student and continue to claim victory in an impressive manner…

No, I had to prevent that. But what should I do? How can I…

*

In an instant, Kanna couldn’t regain her composure due to the flood of memories.

Whose memories are they?

Kanna, Kanna Aurora…

What is the original work? Why do I know this?

Did I do something like that? No, I don’t think I have.

Due to the infusion of unrefined magical power, she began to recall the memories she had lost, but it didn’t truly become her own memory and instead led to further confusion.

Is this my memory? No, I’ve never done that!

I don’t have any memories from March to May in this place; I just came to my senses next to Hamin!

Kanna remembered when she opened her eyes.

Her tiny studio apartment flashed by briefly, but soon the weather had warmed up, and she recalled that Yoon Hamin was by her side in a nice place.

The unrefined magical power, diluted by the people within the barrier for control, did not completely return Kanna to normal.

“Ugh, ah…”

A groan slipped out of Kanna’s mouth as she struggled in confusion.

The researchers intending to administer the magical power a third time halted their actions and observed.

They had to ask about whether Kanna had fully returned based on the visible reactions they could see.

“Do you still not remember the time you encountered the monster?”

As soon as they asked that, Kanna rummaged through her thoughts.

She desperately wished to put an end to this confusion.

No matter how much her mind regressed, she could not ignore how difficult it was, so she diligently searched through her memories.

She rummaged through memories that she wasn’t sure could be confirmed as her own.

“Goo, ugh, ack,”

Weird memories seemed to pierce through Kanna’s mind in an instant.

Terrible moments she believed she could never have experienced.

She felt a shiver while indirectly sensing the need to enter the restroom.

And at the end of that came the moment Hamin became her friend, and she felt a small joy inside.

Kanna Aurora, someone who shouldn’t have become friends with Hamin, felt glad at the single phrase “let’s be friends,” but that brief joy soon returned to the memories they desired.

She recalled that what she had initially aimed to do after coming to her senses was something she had executed without even remembering.

Even though she thought that the intention of what she wanted to do had not changed from then to now, Kanna wished to put a stop to the current situation because she knew what it was like.

You fool, doing that will only prompt the monster’s actions more, she thought.

But Kanna couldn’t stop what her past self had done, and that too was just an unreachable voice.

“This, this…”

Kanna shivered and replied.

Without knowing what village it was, and with only the clue that it was a village near the barrier, her desperate search for the totem led her to provoke the monster, which resulted in the monster finding her in the next invasion.

That was also a memory slightly detached from herself, however.

As the monster kicked towards her, and she saw the scene where the new monster devoured its arm, she broke into a cold sweat and trembled.

She trembled at the dissonance of recalling something that didn’t feel like her own.

The moment they heard those words, the researchers determined that her brain was fixed and halted the infusion of unrefined magical power.

“It’s restored. We will begin the interrogation.”

They brought in a metal chair with belts equipped to restrain her hands and feet.

Then they pulled Kanna, who had calmed down a bit and was slumped, down from the bed and made her sit in the chair.

Ch. 112 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 112

Stars were beings that burned their bodies to prevent people from getting lost on dark nights.

Because of this, those who couldn’t reach the sky walked the night paths with peace of mind, believing that the direction they followed was correct, guided by the stars.

Do the stars shine for someone?

Even if someone is predetermined, that light isn’t just for one person.

Everyone who can feel that light sees it, follows it, and can rely on it, so it cannot be said to belong to anyone alone.

Still, the stars chose. For whom should they emit their light?

That will was conveyed to Yoon Hamin, and it was Yoon Hamin’s time to choose.

“…So, when will Kanna come out?”

He wanted to bring Kanna here immediately, but knowing that causing a commotion right now would only complicate things for himself and Kanna, he had no choice but to ask this.

But silence returned.

And subtle gazes.

“I think it would be better if I go back now.”

He didn’t like the hints being dropped. It was unsettling that they were trying to send him away without revealing Kanna’s condition.

Why? Is there something they shouldn’t tell him? That couldn’t be right.

Tell me. Right now, where is Kanna and in what condition is she?

“To be honest, we can’t easily let Kanna Aurora go right now. We have many things to ascertain ourselves too. Honestly, it’s the first time for both you and me, and for this ‘monster,’ isn’t it?”

The man sitting opposite Yoon Hamin continued to explain as if Yoon Hamin’s persistence was annoying him.

He intended to give a brief explanation and send him off.

Yoon Hamin quietly listened, as the other party finally began to speak.

The employee tapped his pen and knocked the file.

“So what I’m saying is, we don’t know anything. Even the higher-ups might not have experienced this firsthand. That’s why we’re trying to get information from Kanna Aurora.”

How much time had passed?

They couldn’t stop the heroes from becoming complacent.

The essence of being a hero became blurred, and people started to join without a sense of duty.

Still, there was no problem. Why? Because monsters weren’t appearing.

At the time the barrier was restored, they might have been trembling in fear.

But as time passed, and generations went by, they began to wonder if

perhaps monsters had gone extinct, if only unrefined magical power outside our barrier was humanity’s problem.

And the result was this.

Since they couldn’t confirm what a monster was like, humans’ weakness was taking a passive stance if monsters did not come.

Thus, the opinion from humanity, that is, from the Hero Association, was to extract necessary information from Kanna.

“Then why did you cut off her limbs before? You even put her under surveillance. Do you really think Kanna is an enemy of humanity? No, you fought for your life before?”

Yoon Hamin slammed the desk and shouted.

The startled employee frowned.

“Calm down. And you know that’s not the real issue, right?”

“What is it!”

“It’s a simple story.”

The employee thought Yoon Hamin was trying to blur the essence of the situation.

The idea of her being humanity’s enemy held no meaning now.

What mattered most at this moment was choice.

“For example, if we do nothing, hundreds of people will d*e from a train crash. But if we pull the lever to change the tracks, we can save one person. What will you do?”

Yoon Hamin flinched.

“If you don’t want to become a murderer, even with the lever right in front of you, doing nothing means those hundreds will d*e. In fact, given the current situation, it could be thousands. After four invasions, there have already been 6,000 casualties.”

Despite this, the employee continued unabated.

“If there’s a lever right in front of you, and you didn’t even reach out, what will you say to the hundreds or thousands of bereaved families? This is primarily about humanity’s survival. I’d probably close my eyes and pull the lever myself.”

“That choice itself…!”

“That’s the choice. The one person is just Kanna Aurora.”

The employee found Yoon Hamin a nuisance.

This was an issue that warranted ethical deliberation, but a clear answer wasn’t given at that moment.

The problem facing humanity now was whether to let the situation be, allowing the barrier to fall and people to d*e, or to capture someone, even if they bore no guilt, to save hundreds or thousands.

Yoon Hamin couldn’t understand the employee.

Irritation was rising more and more.

Leave Kanna behind like this?

No way. I can’t go back alone.

The moment he thought that, light began to rise around Yoon Hamin.

His fists clenched, and in the blink of an eye, the previously spacious area filled with light.

It was a release of power that even surprised Yoon Hamin.

Certainly, it must have been suppressed, making it hard to manifest as he wished—so why was this happening?

“W-What is this!”

The employee was taken aback, and Yoon Hamin steadied himself, aiming the light at his neck.

“I can’t go back alone. Please bring Kanna to me.”

The feeling of not wanting to lose Kanna had grown immensely, large enough to cast aside humanity and everything else.

Taking a person’s life as a hostage with reckless abandon was certainly not something a hero should do.

Yet, Yoon Hamin had no regrets. He had no intention of regretting in the future either.

If this could save Kanna, if he could do it without harm, that was enough.

“…I’m not joking.”

The golden eyes of Yoon Hamin, warning that he could genuinely take a life, made the employee swallow.

—

I’m scared, I hate it. It’s cold. Don’t do this.

My arms didn’t move. My wrists were tied with a belt to the armrests of the chair.

The belt was tightened so much that it hurt, and with both arms bound, I couldn’t even hope to escape.

The situation with my legs was no different.

My ankles were tightly bound to the front legs of the chair.

My legs were forced inside the chair, while my feet protruded outside.

No matter how violently I moved, the chair only rattled, and the belts showed no signs of loosening.

I’m tired. It’s impossible to stay like this for long.

It hurts. My wrists hurt, my ankles hurt.

But more than that, I was terrified of the strange machines surrounding me.

“P-Please save me. I-I’ll tell you everything I know… Please…”

I pleaded desperately to those who were too terrifying to speak meaningfully.

I didn’t know much. No, now I did know a little.

It seemed like I had an inkling of what they wanted.

But that didn’t mean the sense of disconnection that this was my memory had disappeared.

After swallowing a sob that rose up, I coughed.

Coughing so hard it hurt my throat, I raised my head while holding back tears.

I want to see Hamin. I feel like he would rescue me splendidly.

But even Hamin couldn’t just recklessly wander around a place like this.

I should be standing by humanity as a hero, but if I make a commotion here, it’s clear that such a story would never come.

So, though I was trembling, I couldn’t bring myself to speak.

The only thing that came to mind was to beg for an easy d*ath.

I want to see Hamin. I must be weak; all I can do is depend on someone.

I must be a fool. I don’t know anything else besides begging here.

Is that why I’m being punished?

If I had made an effort to do everything from start to finish, wouldn’t this have happened?

But I didn’t know how, and that’s why I ended up like this.

[Kanna, if you tell the whole truth, you will be able to return completely.]

“Yes, yes… I-I’ll tell you everything…”

[Then, first, how many times have you had contact with the monsters?]

I thought hard upon hearing that.

How many times? I need to rummage through my memories.

Please, come to me.

I fumbled through memories that felt like they weren’t mine.

Because I spread the totem and shared the weakness of the new monster at first, that’s one.

Then, another… after being picked up in a car, that’s twice.

Then, meeting at the academy was three times?

Three times…!

No, no. Hamin said I was in pain, and that was also because of the monster, so it’s four times.

“Yes, four times!”

I trembled.

I felt like fear was making it hard to think.

I want to see Hamin. I want to ask him to show me the twinkling stars.

Then maybe my heart would feel a little more at ease.

[Under what circumstances did the monster attempt to contact Kanna?]

Uh.

W-What was it?

I couldn’t remember everything because it didn’t feel like my memory.

I could only recall that such things had happened; the feelings of that time didn’t remain.

It’s not me. No, I am me, but the current me is not me.

What should I say? What can I say to avoid more pain?

H-Hamin would know. I hope Hamin tells me.

No, wait, wait.

“I-It came to find me because I was mean to the totem…”

[And?]

“And… and also… Ah! It told me the weakness of the oddly shaped monster…!”

Once I said that, there was no guidance.

Fortunately, it seemed I had passed a hurdle.

I wish they would just untie this.

I will tell you everything I know; I just hope it doesn’t scare me.

I want to run away. But it’s impossible to escape in a world surrounded by walls.

Someone, someone, hold my hand…

I’m scared. I feel like I’m going to cry.

[Then how did you know that?]

At the voice that seemed to demand more answers, I blankly raised my head.

The emotionless voice coming through the speaker made my mind feel completely white this time.

Ch. 113 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 113

To survive, I have to do anything.

But there are many things I can’t say as they are.

Vaguely, I had a memory that seemed like it belonged to me but didn’t, leading to a different answer, yet I couldn’t speak that answer aloud.

Even if I spoke of such absurd things, I would just be seen as a lunatic.

So I thought it might be better to just call it an ability.

Or I could just brush it off with something like “I don’t know why I can’t verify it, but I’ve known it all along.”

Alright, if I want to live, I have to do it that way.

Even if I can’t live, if I want to feel less pain, then I should do it that way.

So maybe this is the right choice.

I should wish for that.

“…I don’t really know the reason, but I, I already knew it. It came to mind vaguely—”

[Vaguely?]

But here and now, it seemed that ambiguous answers were not tolerated, as a fierce voice cut me off.

What cannot be proven must be doubted. Is that what this is about?

But I was so scared to talk about this.

I didn’t really think that way, and it was a story from a memory I couldn’t recall, so how could I present it as a fact?

By this point, I was terrified of what kind of knowledge I had and what I was thinking.

If I had known this would happen, I should have just continued living like a fool.

Honestly, I was happy just laughing alongside Hamin.

Hamin wanted me to come back.

He wanted me to return to my original self, and I wanted to respond to that desire.

But what about now?

Now it was too scary.

If I had just said to do nothing and to be happy together like this, it surely would have become a stumbling block, right?

Saying that would only mean I was asking for someone to look after me.

As an academy student, it was hard to go to the academy because I was in pain.

I caught a glimpse of Hamin studying beside me while I was studying content I didn’t know.

Hamin said it was only natural that I couldn’t follow the classes since three months had passed, but couldn’t I just catch up?

Should I have been more stubborn?

No, would the situation have turned out any differently?

I was frustrated because I didn’t know anything and couldn’t understand why I was in this state.

Is this all a problem arising from having no memories, just as Hamin said?

If I had known, at least I could have mentally prepared myself, even if I was scared, I would have had the confidence to endure it.

But I didn’t really know if that was true.

“…Uh, yes. I still don’t know how I came to know it…”

I stumbled over my words.

If I referred to it as an ability, it seemed they would ask me to show it again, leaving me with no choice but to hold back.

No matter how foolish I had become, I was still able to choose the optimal answer if I thought about it to some degree.

Objectively, I might not have known, but the fact remained that it seemed like the best answer to me.

As far as I knew, there were no abilities that could only be used once.

An ability was a unique power embedded in one’s body, while magic was a universal power that opposed unique characteristics, so there wouldn’t be an ability that could be used only once.

To my knowledge, I had never even seen someone with such an ability.

That’s why I came up with that answer, and I wished it would also be seen as the best answer by others.

[Then we will put that answer on hold. Next, I will ask what you did during the time you encountered the monster and were missing.]

Oh no, I messed up.

I felt like I understood, but this ambiguous sensation kept delaying me from giving the answer.

As if I knew yet didn’t know, experienced yet hadn’t, I shut my eyes tightly against this strange sensation.

“Well, I was like a toy, cutting off and making limbs…”

[…I see.]

Had I heard that somewhere? Did they already know everything?

The fact that it passed so blandly somehow made it more terrifying.

I wondered how much those people knew about me.

There were memories I didn’t even know of, yet I was worried about the existence of information they knew without me saying anything.

What if I messed up somewhere now and contradicted what I had said in the past?

As I was about to clench my fists from the tension, the belt that tightly held my wrist was obstructing even that.

I felt like my expression was about to crumble.

[What exactly did the monster do?]

The questions kept coming.

It seemed like this conversation would continue until their curiosity was satisfied.

It was hard and scary, but it was surely better than being hurt.

I desperately recalled and, calming my pounding heart, opened my mouth to escape this situation.

“Uh, um, so… it implanted something in my body.”

There was a moment of silence.

And at the end of it, an answer returned.

[We can determine that the regenerating limbs contain the properties of the monster, which suggests a history of having cut off Miss Kanna’s limbs. However, even so, Miss Kanna managed to regenerate her limbs again, having lost her prosthetic arm and leg.]

I tilted my head in confusion over what they were trying to say.

[This leads us to conclude that the monster must have implanted something unknown into Miss Kanna’s body, something akin to a ‘totem’. This means it could either pinpoint her location or contribute to breaking barriers.]

And I felt a tightening tension, as if I were no different from that monster.

“No, no…! I could never…!”

[Even if you say you went once, you are the only one who encountered the monster three times during the three collapses. Moreover, the monster was the one that sought out you.]

“No, that’s not true… but, it’s not…”

[Is the regeneration of the limbs similar to the ability of the monster you killed this time? I heard that monster also regenerated its fists, so does it have its own abilities as a monster?]

I didn’t know anything.

While discussing the monster was fine, talking about my current state was difficult.

I didn’t even know what I was myself, so how could I respond?

Yet, discussing the monster seemed a bit off too.

At first, they might be pleased to hear information unknown to humanity, but what would happen if, as time flowed, they got angry and demanded to know where such information came from?

In my current state, I vaguely linked the information I didn’t understand to the word “novel” that felt out of reach in my memory but wanted to drop such a chilling thought.

Living as if I were watching from a step back is not who I am.

I haven’t lived like that. I didn’t think that way.

Even if I don’t know what’s what, this moment was so precious to me.

The time I spent with Hamin was joyful.

When the time came to guard the house alone, I felt a bit lonely, but still, thinking about how Hamin would come back and cook for me made it bearable, even if I was lonely and bored.

But now, that wouldn’t be possible.

Hamin couldn’t come here.

I had initially said my goodbyes from the heart, so Hamin wouldn’t come.

How disappointing. But if I asked to be saved, wouldn’t Hamin end up in the same situation as me?

Surely, Hamin wouldn’t be in such a situation, right?

He would have given up quickly and distanced himself.

“…I don’t know.”

[If you keep avoiding answers like this, we have ways too.]

With the sharply falling voice, the researchers hurried out, leaving the machine behind.

“B-but I truly don’t know…!”

They abandoned me, rattling in the chair, leaving me alone in this vast space surrounded by machines.

The fact that there was no one next to me who would harm me relieved me a bit, but that was all.

Then, at the end, I heard the sound of the door opening again.

*

In an instant, the interior of the building was in chaos.

Not everyone in the association building was a hero or an awakened one who couldn’t become a hero.

There were entirely ordinary people, and the light in Yoon Hamin’s hand was enough to create confusion among them.

People fled or hesitated from a distance as they saw Yoon Hamin, who looked like he was aiming a g*n at them.

For some unknown reason, Yoon Hamin, whose ability seemed to have become easier to manifest than before, unleashed his power, and the employee who had just been in the same space found the ability directed toward his neck.

Unlike a g*n, if a hand was attacked, there was no way to lose grip, making it even more menacing.

“…Do you know where Kanna is right now? If you do, please guide me there.”

“Ah, ah! I-I really don’t know! I swear I don’t!”

The employee shouted that as he hoped the other heroes on guard would come quickly.

And as if granting that wish, a shadow rushed in to tackle Yoon Hamin.

If Yoon Hamin’s ability had been lacking, he would have surely been hit, but now he showed no sign of hesitation.

“Ho.”

A man with dark skin instinctively dodged Yoon Hamin’s ability and turned his head, only to see Yoon Hamin wearing an expression that suggested he could k*ll that man at any moment.

“Don’t you see the hostage? Find someone who knows where Kanna is.”

“Who is that?”

The hero remarked incredulously and assumed a stance.

Yoon Hamin gritted his teeth.

The stars began to shine more brightly.

It resonated with a low roaring sound, buzzing as if about to explode, causing the worker standing next to Yoon Hamin to gasp.

The hero regretted not having subdued him during the initial ambush, and gestured for calm.

“Calm down and withdraw your abilities. It’s not as if everything will be resolved like that.”

But such a thing wouldn’t work on Yoon Hamin now.

“Then what should I do? I’m not asking for much! I just want to take my friend back!”

Boom!

Yoon Hamin shouted while veins bulged in his neck; at the same moment, all the walls in the corridor behind him were shattered, and all the glass broke.

“…I will say it again. Please let me take Kanna back. Okay?”

Ch. 114 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 114

Yoon Hamin prayed desperately.

He didn’t want to k*ll anyone here. He was worried about how he could protect Kanna if he had to become a criminal and was dragged away somewhere.

But the reason he was acting this way was that there was no guarantee that Kanna would return anytime soon.

If Kanna was not going to come back anyway, what was there that would prevent him from risking his life right now?

Thinking this way made it seem like he was charging in without thinking twice.

At this moment, both the hero and the staff member held hostage by Yoon Hamin were standing there awkwardly without saying a word.

The hero didn’t even know who Kanna was, and while the staff member did know, they were at a loss as they couldn’t do anything outside of their duties.

The hero let out a deep sigh.

In a situation where things were getting out of hand like this, just approaching could pose a threat to the staff, so they needed to calm the situation down first.

Even if they did not intend to harm anyone, it could happen out of anger, so they had to be careful.

“Hey, student, I know you’re feeling uneasy about something, but if you try to resolve it that way, it won’t get solved.”

“—Then what will happen if you take away my abilities? You’re just underestimating me! I’m saying I want to go back with Kanna! Why won’t you let me go again after bringing us here?”

Yoon Hamin spoke with a growl, and the hero pretended to be relaxed as he shoved his hands into his pockets.

“Yeah, that might be possible. There could have been some misunderstanding, and we need to look into it closely, right?”

While saying that, he skillfully manipulated his device without looking and then requested assistance from other heroes.

The ordinary staff members who remained at the association withdrew, and shortly after, nearby heroes began to gather and slowly make their entrance.

The people who came from the unseen area of Yoon Hamin stood in his blind spots and glanced over curiously.

They looked in from beyond the window, and some even aimed from across the building and prepared to sh**t.

If it seemed like the staff member would d*e because of Yoon Hamin, at least ten people would rush in to activate their abilities and intervene.

No matter how strong Yoon Hamin was, he couldn’t possibly handle multiple active heroes.

Knowing that, Yoon Hamin started to hesitate and became wary of his surroundings.

He thought heroes might start to gather soon.

“…Right. If there’s a misunderstanding, that would be a relief, and it would be good if my innocence could be proven after a thorough investigation. But shouldn’t you at least let me be there as an observer? Or perhaps allow people to see transparently in a place with CCTV!”

Yoon Hamin exclaimed like this, but it was of no concern to the hero.

Not only did he know nothing of who Kanna was, but since it was also a matter being handled by higher-ups in the association, it was difficult for an ordinary hero to intervene and say anything, so they continued to think of a way to save the staff member.

Then, the hero who had been in a standoff with Yoon Hamin spoke up.

“So then, if I say I don’t know and the other person also says they don’t know, should we just k*ll him?”

“…….”

Yoon Hamin closed his mouth.

Not being able to easily answer the question of whether they would really k*ll someone showed that he knew seeking Kanna through violence would be something he couldn’t be forgiven for.

“No matter how much you claim you don’t want to k*ll, the hostage could develop trauma, and the fear of potentially dying lingers, making it hard for people.”

“…….”

“If you really don’t want to k*ll, then let go of your hands and let’s talk.”

Yoon Hamin lowered the stars he had aimed at the staff.

Instead, he integrated them with the stars next to him.

“…What comes from talking? Will you tell me where Kanna is and what she’s doing?”

“That’s outside of our jurisdiction and beyond our abilities, so it’s hard to…”

“Then can’t this person take me there? If you keep contacting the higher-ups, can’t they inform you? After all, we’re in this building.”

Despite the difficult request, the hero remained silent and seemed to ponder.

Realizing that Yoon Hamin was grasping at straws, he probed further.

Whether he knew it or not, Yoon Hamin glanced at the staff, who had slightly lowered their aggressiveness and seemed relieved.

The instant he looked away.

Ping.

A small sound of something colliding was heard.

Yoon Hamin felt his body slightly bounce back, and then he realized he was momentarily distancing from the staff member next to him.

“!”

Due to the shock from the ability that was fired in sync with the signal, Yoon Hamin’s vision became dizzy.

Grabbing his aching head from the impact, he could see people rushing toward him even through his blurred vision.

He would not truly k*ll anyone anyway, so setting aside the fleeing hostage, he thought to protect himself by scattering his abilities.

“Grab him!”

The hero who had been in a standoff with Yoon Hamin shouted, and at that moment, someone burst through the shattered window.

“Get out of the way!!”

Yoon Hamin spat out an unpleasant voice that scraped up from his throat and condensed light.

Although he was weakened by the blow from the monster, he strangely felt a surge of power in that moment and wanted to know why.

However, there was no time to ponder such questions, and Yoon Hamin wielded his abilities to tell everyone not to approach.

Golden eyes moved back and forth.

Having come this far, he thought he should go directly to where Kanna might be.

He figured she would most likely have gone to the lower floors, so should he go down? Just as he briefly contemplated this, at that moment, the heroes charged in.

The hero who had released the shockwave reached out his hand towards Yoon Hamin’s abdomen.

Thud.

After a sensation of a slight push, an agonizing pain enveloped Yoon Hamin’s body as if his insides were being flipped inside out.

“Cough!”

He had to regain his composure, but the hands trying to subdue him were closing in like they wouldn’t let him.

Yoon Hamin wielded his stars in pain, and in the midst of this, a hero with lightning-fast footwork came up and tripped him.

While the heroes had the aim of excluding Yoon Hamin, their goal was also to prevent him from committing a crime and to calm him down.

With that goal in mind, they were genuinely focused on dealing with the student.

“Don’t come near!”

Yoon Hamin struggled.

He placed his hands on the ground, determined to get up right away even after falling.

“What is the problem? Is it such a big wish for me to want to go back with Kanna…?!”

In truth, he felt a sense of despair that this could have happened even without his abilities being devoured.

It was a feeling that made him want to collapse right there.

“Why, why do you just keep saying it cannot be?!”

Tears welled up.

He hated that the world only said Kanna was an annoyance when she meant so much to him.

He wanted to stop that perception.

But that was not going to happen.

“If all of this continues like this, then me too… me too…”

He clenched his fists, but he trembled and stopped, realizing he couldn’t truly unleash his abilities against the people around him.

In that moment, countless hands overwhelmed him and restrained him.

In the end, Yoon Hamin was taken to the detention facility inside the building as a means of conveying to him to calm down, and he opened his eyes blankly.

And he silently shed tears in the corner where no one could see.

He felt how powerless he was.

He questioned why he failed to protect Kanna despite feeling the danger.

Ultimately, he was left in agony by the fact that he was only protected by Kanna in the end.

The ability of the stars? What use is that? He couldn’t protect Kanna right now.

So he bit his lip until it bled.

Between the subtle warmth, there was a taste of bl**d.

Kanna is gone.

Where is Kanna?

Is this really goodbye?

Please, tell me where she is.

Someone tell me what expression Kanna is making.

Tell me she’ll come back.

Yoon Hamin chewed on that sorrow.

The fact that he would have reached the same conclusion even if his abilities hadn’t been consumed made him feel even more miserable.

And then suddenly, he tilted his head.

“—Now that I think about it.”

A small, hoarse voice scattered through the air.

Curious about why his ability had returned slightly, he posed the question.

Looking at the wall, he threw the question to himself, and soon he answered his own inquiry.

Knowing that his ability is greatly influenced by the stars, he understood better than anyone that if the stars do not function properly or shine brighter, it would affect him.

And now.

Despite his abilities being suppressed, Yoon Hamin was even stronger than before.

It wasn’t that his power had returned; he had become stronger.

If that’s the case, it meant only one thing.

The darkness deepened. Other lights disappeared, making the stars more visible.

While thinking about why the stars could shine while others were dark, Yoon Hamin’s heart jolted.

“…Ah.”

Could it be because Kanna is gone?

Because I am distant from Kanna?

At that sudden thought, he rummaged through his past.

He recalled the time he did mentoring with Sel and the time he faced monsters near the barrier—he noticed something subtly different about himself.

It was a story that could be easily put aside as being in good or bad condition, so he had never seriously pondered it, but for some reason, it seemed that only when Kanna was absent, his condition edged toward the slightly better.

It wasn’t that his body was weakened due to unrefined magical power.

The powers of ability itself shouldn’t be influenced like this.

Was Kanna having some influence?

No, I don’t want to think negatively.

For now, I want to save Kanna.

But I need more, more strength.

I don’t care how it affects me. I don’t mind losing my light.

If you’re here, it’s okay not to shine.

But if you aren’t, I want to shine just until the moment you can come to me, so you can recognize me when I reach out to you.

With that, Yoon Hamin’s fists clenched tightly.

Ch. 115 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 115

“Please save me. I’ll do anything. I’ll say everything I can say. But, but there are things I can’t say.

It might sound like I’m just making excuses, but I thought that if I talked about this, they would just call me crazy and treat me even worse.

If I were to say I can see the future, I thought they would make me use the same ability to see the future, so I couldn’t do that.

Why are these people doing this to me? A memory that feels like it’s both mine and not mine answers for me with a sense of disconnection.

Is this what it feels like to resent myself? I rattled around bound hand and foot.

I wanted to escape, struggling, but as expected, the belts that restrained my limbs tightened around my wrists and ankles. The rattling made my wrists and ankles hurt even more.

While frowning, a person dressed in black approached me. The fact that they were wearing a mask only heightened my fear.

They weren’t holding anything in their hands, but they started rummaging through the things the researchers had brought earlier.

I thought it would be better to have no one beside me when everyone suddenly left, but with just one person coming in, the fear intensified.

Cold sweat ran down my forehead. My head kept turning toward the person to see why they had come.

“Um, just a moment…”

I called out urgently, but they didn’t seem interested, either not willing to listen or simply ignoring me as they began rummaging through something.

They opened a large suitcase that looked like it had wheels and started looking inside, but I couldn’t see anything from my side, so my gaze trembled.

“Th-that, um…”

That person wasn’t listening to me. They probably only respond if I report to someone higher up.

That thought made me j*rk my head toward the place where the black glass was.

“Wait a moment…! If there’s anything else, anything else I know, I’ll tell you all of it!! Really, really, I don’t know what the monster hasn’t told me, I don’t know…?! If there’s anything I need to do to understand, I’ll cooperate…! I won’t run away, I’ll do well…!”

[That’s a good mindset.]

A voice returned, as if they were satisfied with my answer.

I thought they might have smiled if they were standing in front of me.

But that didn’t seem to provide a reason to stop the man next to me, so another remark followed.

[To be honest, from what we see, Miss Kanna’s actions aren’t that threatening. We are already aware from the reports that Miss Kanna is trying to show a cooperative attitude toward humanity.]

“Yes, yes… then!”

[However— the results are always different from that, aren’t they?]

“What…?”

A bewildered voice slipped from my lips.

[From our perspective, it just seems that Miss Kanna is trying to make a good impression on us. If Miss Kanna is truly innocent and merely swept up by the monsters, I feel sorry for doubting you. However, looking at the results so far, the damage caused by the monsters is far greater than what Miss Kanna has shown us.]

“Wait a moment… b-but!”

I had to say something, but what should I say?

I wish someone would tell me the answer. I don’t know what the best response is here.

I felt like one wrong step could lead to my d*ath, making it hard to think clearly.

It was terrifying to think that one mistake would make it impossible to turn back.

What kind of choice should I make?

As my mind struggled to function, a voice seemed to block my escape.

[The things that Miss Kanna cannot answer will not receive a response no matter how forcefully we ask. Whether you actually know or not, we can only speculate as long as we do not receive a definitive answer from you.]

I couldn’t say anything.

[And already the barriers have collapsed four times. Since Miss Kanna entered the Academy, there have been four incursions by monsters over the

course of about three months. We cannot help but be suspicious, and we find it difficult to know what the monsters have done to Miss Kanna and what they are plotting behind the scenes.

That is why we are afraid.

With humanity trapped within the barriers, the existence of Miss Kanna, which threatens the barriers themselves, raises concerns about what may arise in the future.

More than 6,000 civilians have died without being able to resist the monsters. There are also not a few heroes who have fallen in battle.]

It might be because of me that they died.

[According to reports from the Lamiris family during our second meeting, it was said that there was an attack by monsters while moving to a bunker used by the Lamiris family, specifically targeting the location Miss Kanna was in. It was an area so remote that people rarely passed through.]

It’s because of me.

[It is also evidence that they are tracking Miss Kanna’s location.]

Is everything because of me?

[Moreover, it has been reported that Miss Kanna’s limbs were severed, and the humanity side has executed the same procedures, with regeneration happening as reported. This means that not only the limbs but the whole body has undergone monster transformation. Thus, we can provide evidence for the earlier discussion.]

Wouldn’t it have been safer if I had never existed in the first place?

But, wouldn’t that be too cruel to say?

I didn’t maliciously pass on information.

[Moreover, all three attacks occurred simultaneously with the collapse of the barriers and attacked the Academy. This is…]

I found that the things I could say were diminishing.

Every bit of evidence pointed to the fact that everything had happened because I was there.

“…I…”

What on earth should I say here?

Do I even have anything to clarify?

I didn’t have the information to respond.

No, while I knew, I didn’t have the self-awareness that I had acted in such a way, nor could I clearly remember the choices I made and the past I had.

I was dragged by the monster? Ah, as I searched my memory, I remembered being dragged.

But is this truly my memory?

Having this situation repeat, I began to resign myself.

I had said I would answer anything, but I realized they weren’t calling me here to punish me for being a bad person.

They were simply saying they were afraid of the things that happened because I exist.

They didn’t want monsters breaking down the walls to contact me repeatedly because I was here.

What could I possibly say to that?

Even if Hamin came, I didn’t think it would resolve anything.

Regardless, Hamin would have to be in third year to save the world, but he was still a first-year, which was a problem.

Simply put, terrible things were happening because I existed, and that bothered me, and if I was just looking for something I could do about it, what could I really say?

I should just wait and ask, then what can I do?

And the answers didn’t particularly come back in words.

When I came to my senses, a shadow approached swiftly.

A person with a gas mask, unable to see properly except for their eyes, stood before me holding a hammer.

The sound of their heavy breathing felt ominous.

Ah, are they planning to k*ll me with that?

If they’re going to end it quickly by killing me…

[From now on, we will check Miss Kanna’s abilities. If we gain certainty, we will later examine how the monsters find Miss Kanna.]

They’re not trying to k*ll me?

Can I, live?

The moment I thought that, what had been hiding in the man’s fist revealed itself.

When there was just a hammer, I thought I’d only get hit hard, but if there was a nail, things changed.

Of course, I was sure it would hurt to be hit with the hammer, but I wondered if I could endure it, and my dislike intensified with the thought of the sharp object.

“Wait, just a moment! Please, just a moment!! I’ll do anything!!”

The chair rattled.

As I pleaded fervently, an indifferent voice came from behind.

[First, please secure her limbs.]

No.

No!

“Don’t, don’t do it! Please!”

As I screamed, the man’s fist landed heavily on my hand.

“Ugh!”

And the nail that had been lightly placed on my finger trembled toward my shaking hand.

“Please, just a moment…”

Tears began to well up in my eyes.

Unlike the desperate cries I had grasped, I was now desperately sobbing and pleading.

But before the indifferent and uncaring person who only followed orders,

my desperate pleas seemed to lose all meaning.

While my palm couldn’t move, I continued to move my fingers because I truly despised it.

There was no point in moving up and down, but I could somehow move side to side.

The man who held my hand seemed to have intended to secure it with his fist and comfortably drive the nail in, but my constant finger movements seemed to annoy him.

And at that moment, his fist flew toward my face.

Smack.

I felt a twist in my nose.

With tears already flowing, it felt like my eyes were throbbing from the pain.

I had been hit so hard that my teeth felt numb.

I heard a ringing in my ears.

As I coughed, my voice seemed to sound distant.

Following the thrusts meant to keep me still, there was a clatter. The nails fell indifferently to the floor.

Then, as if to say my bother was meaningless, the man tightly gripped my finger.

On that iron chair, a man attempting to drive an iron nail into my finger looked terrifyingly relentless.

It was the moment a sharp pillar thrust down on a gently arching small defense line.

Clang. The hammer struck the nail.

The nail crushed my fingertip.

The embedded nail pierced my finger.

And after making a hole, it hit the chair.

It hurts.

Ch. 116 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 116

I did everything wrong.

Is it because I’m still alive?

I will apologize for everything. Because I am alive, because I exist, if there are people who are dead, I sincerely feel sorry.

But I still don’t know. Even though it wasn’t something I did, and I got caught up in it, I wonder if I really have to take responsibility like this.

Still, if I caused harm,

if I lost someone precious, I sincerely apologize.

Please forgive me.

I don’t want to d*e. But more than that, I don’t want to feel pain.

If there is pain that continues even if I live, I think it would be better to d*e.

But why does it repeat like this?

Is it because I cannot take responsibility for thousands of deaths as if it were one?

I’m sorry. I must be a fool for not being able to make the best choice.

I’m sorry. I didn’t think I could run away from what I did just because I lost my memory.

Since I’ve lost it, since I forgot, would you forgive the me who lived comfortably?

However, even though I think this way, accepting malice seems overwhelming to me.

If I said I killed, I might have no excuses even if I was beaten again and again, but because I existed, I got caught up, and because of that, others also got involved and died, so I have no words.

Feel free to condemn me as irresponsible.

You can curse me for running away from responsibility.

Still, I really don’t know.

What choice should I have made?

The problem starts from the moment I got dragged by the monster, but I couldn’t not say the weakness of the new monster, could I?

If I didn’t know what a totem was, I couldn’t just let the people near the barrier d*e, could I?

I didn’t know what the best choice was.

Was it bad that I, who asked for help because I couldn’t do it alone before I lost my memory? After all, there was only one hand to help.

Was it all wrong that I tried to calm myself and desperately fight to do it on my own when that one person briefly moved away?

Would it have been a better scenario for humanity if I didn’t return after being dragged by the monster?

I’m sorry.

For coming back.

If I regain my memory, I want to feel that again.

What did I truly feel when I saw Hamin letting me into my home naturally?

I would have felt truly happy.

*

Every time a nail was hammered into each of Kanna’s fingers, she screamed.

Her eyes widened as if they would pop out, and she screamed until her voice gave out.

If all it wanted was to be fixed, it didn’t need to go this far, but Kanna repeated it many times, thinking she might have the monster’s power.

Who knows? What if the true feelings that were hiding suddenly burst out and wielded power?

It may seem unlikely, but instinctively, it might be possible to release power.

Her grades at the Academy were at rock bottom, but just like the grades Yoon Hamin received this time, it could have been intentional.

Or she might have suddenly gained power after her transformation into a monster.

Grades are a good sample, but they are not absolute.

Grades are in last place. In fact, she couldn’t inflict any harm even on the monster, but at the very least, she fought at the end and didn’t expand her ability to save people.

This level was something that could only be described as reaching a peak, no matter how instinctual it was.

Wouldn’t it seem strange if a kid who didn’t know how to use their power suddenly had strong lightning abilities and could somewhat release magical power explosions using electricity?

No matter how much they installed power-amplifying prosthetics, the output surpassed imagination, so one could only conclude that her original power level must be at least above a certain point.

“Ahhhh!!”

Every time a nail pierced her finger, every time a metal nail barely penetrated the iron chair, the chair rattled.

She couldn’t say anything, and the figure that used to beg was nowhere to be seen, her body was just bouncing.

The man in the gas mask continued hammering without care, despite the shape of Kanna that seemed to say she wanted to escape.

Kanna gradually lost her sanity, and she couldn’t even swallow her saliva, drool dripping.

It seemed like she was going to do something, but until all ten of her fingers were pierced, until all her nails were crushed, she inflicted no harm on the man hammering.

Kanna, who lost consciousness due to the continuous pain, slumped down.

The slightly tense atmosphere faded, leaving the disheveled Kanna momentarily unattended.

The people who were watching from beyond the black glass tilted their heads.

“Could it be that she couldn’t recharge her magical power?”

“She received unrefined magical power, but if she focused on treatment using that, it wouldn’t be a bad story.”

“It seems like we need to observe the situation further. Since we don’t know anything, we don’t even know which side we’re on.”

In fear, they carried out such actions. It wasn’t exactly a pleasant story.

Others might ask why they were doing such things.

But they saw validity in it.

Since the year Kanna entered the Academy, the long-standing barrier that hadn’t collapsed began to collapse.

The monster brought the new monster, and whether it had sharpened its claws for decades or brought about a new kind of monster, Kanna spoke of that monster’s weakness.

Then it seemed she disappeared, but she returned as she was. She was the only case that was dragged away by the monster but lived to tell the tale, yet it was still at a stage that had to be watched.

And soon after, the second collapse occurred again.

Unlike the past, before they could wonder about the frequent occurrences of the collapse, they received information through the Lamiris family that the monster contacted Kanna again.

Isn’t it strange? Everyone next to her died, but Kanna alone survived.

Now in the third instance, they entered the Academy and pointed at Kanna.

In the fourth instance, they even fought each other.

They seemed to have a clear idea of Kanna’s location and were planning to keep her alive for the purpose of surveillance or obtaining information, but

it appeared that around the second and third encounters, they changed their mind and aimed to k*ll her.

In the first and second, they let her live,

in the third and fourth, they attempted to k*ll her.

Still, it was a problem. The very existence of Kanna posed ongoing risks for the barrier to continue collapsing.

Therefore, it was even more problematic.

Not only could the barrier near where Kanna was located fall, but the damage that could arise from that was unfathomably vast.

“It’s almost certain that we’ve severed ties with the monster, so if we say we don’t know, it’s right not to know, but still…”

A certain person’s gaze moved toward the unconscious Kanna.

“If we leave her like this, won’t it be dangerous? It’s already the third time. A more frequent occurrence than before. At this rate, the population inside the barrier will decrease further. If the population, which should continue to grow, decreases so drastically, it could naturally lead to extinction even without monsters.”

At those words, everyone reluctantly nodded their heads.

Of course, saving the hundreds and thousands of lives before them was important, but they couldn’t ignore the upcoming population decline, so they tried to make a cold judgment.

This was all for humanity.

If one sacrifice could prolong humanity’s existence by a few years.

As they organized their thoughts in silence, a siren rang inside the building.

“…What’s going on?”

When an elderly staff member asked that, contact came immediately.

As the beeping rang out, the young staff member pressed the button right away.

[—There has begun to be cracks in the northwestern barrier. All staff members are requested to evacuate quickly, and heroes should quickly evacuate from the barrier collapse.]

“I told you to quickly eliminate the totem unless it’s an emergency! Not being able to take care of that one thing!”

The elderly staff member became angry.

“Please calm down. Finding a totem in this vast land is quite a difficult task…”

“Didn’t I say that it would be better to use the totem to identify where the monster is coming from?”

“The monster isn’t an idiot. If it senses the strong energy of the totem, it might even avoid it. Having all the power focused on one side is more dangerous.”

The staff member holding the microphone replied like that.

“Then shall we evacuate for now? Please back up the information that was here today, sigh, there is no useful information. Let’s wrap things up quickly and move to the bunker.”

“Yes!”

Finally, turning his head to look at the glass, he called out to the staff placed in that experimental area.

“Thank you for your hard work. Please tie a rope around your neck to keep it secure, in case you might move the chair.”

At those words, the staff nodded and took a rope out of a box and threw it to the ceiling.

The rope that climbed over the numerous fasteners was quickly knotted and secured, and the opposite end was finally placed around Kanna’s neck.

And to escape the danger of the barrier collapse, they left the place as it was.

Then one staff member asked the staff holding the microphone.

“Um, can we leave Miss Kanna behind?”

“Where do you want to take her? In this situation, taking her with us would actually increase the chance of the monster coming. I wouldn’t want to reveal the location of the bunker and put others at risk.”

Upon hearing that, everyone understood and withdrew from the area.

So Kanna, even though she lost consciousness, was left with her head raised due to the rope tied around her.

And she was left alone in that state.

Abandoned.

Ch. 117 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 117

Outside the Barrier.

The clan known as the ‘Monsters’, with black hair and red eyes, lived each day marginalized outside the Barrier.

People inside the Barrier had only seen these beings in books, but for them, this was reality and life.

What were considered monsters inside the Barrier were just animals outside.

Since there were too few people to build a new civilization, even if they made a home among the abandoned buildings outside the Barrier, that was as far as it went.

They knew how to use things, but just like they couldn’t use electronic devices without electricity circulating in the world, they were repeating an almost primitive way of life.

The only thing they managed to do was weave clothes, so to speak. Even that was only possible if there were monsters that could produce thread, so wearing shabby clothes was their daily existence.

In such a life, some adapted while others clearly could not accept the situation. It was none other than Reika, the one who had broken the Barrier multiple times.

She wondered why she wasn’t angry after hearing information passed down from her father.

Was it reasonable to remain silent now, when she once hated humans for driving them away due to being different, being scary, or being feared for the harm they could cause?

If she wasn't going to have descendants in the future, it wouldn't matter, but she couldn't understand how others could be satisfied living like this when they were still going to live.

It was understandable not to give up what they had, but how could one live without being angry after being rejected to this extent?

She felt she had to be angry. And she had to let the humans who consistently rejected them know.

What they had rejected was a product of jealousy and enmity.

Of course, apart from that, Reika was also indulging in her own catharsis. In this dull daily life, she found joy in not only hunting monsters for food but also in carefully selecting those to use to break down the Barrier.

A scream echoed through the monotonous routine.

Like waves rising on a calm sea, she enjoyed creating disturbances and observing them.

Perhaps wanting to give her suitable power, her ability as an Awakened One allowed her to condense and carry monsters and magical power.

To do that, the first step was to tame the monsters she would carry.

"…Hmm. How many totems are left? It feels like there are only a few."

Reika thought of Kanna, who was persistently being annoying. Because of that girl, people began to discover the existence of totems and started erasing them.

Because of that, future plans were slightly disrupted, but she thought it was okay since Habar, who was foolishly strong, was around, so she looked around.

If she found a tasty monster and handed it over, they would help her again.

While thinking so, she noticed a few monsters she had released near the Barrier starting to rumble.

Since she couldn’t carry a pile of marbles in her pocket, she had released some into nature, and now monsters were charging at the wall one by one, pushing through the grass.

Boom!

Though the wall, a combination of the Barrier and Veil, didn’t break, there was definitely some shock, as she felt the vibrations trembling.

“…What is it?”

She felt something strange. She thought there weren’t many totems left inside the wall and that more preparation was needed, but she sensed a strange flow coming from within.

Eventually, she realized what that flow was.

Reika widened her eyes and looked at the epicenter of the sensation. She couldn’t see beyond the wall, but she could feel it accurately.

Monsters sensing the strange energy began to act strangely, and birds that had been sitting hidden in the grass flapped their wings and fled the forest.

Raising her head, she saw a flock of birds.

But more importantly was that she could sense the flow of the one she had considered annoying.

It felt like a dying gasp for some reason, but at least it was a problem that they were still alive.

She was sure she had dropped a solid-headed monster on its head, killing it, so how were they still going?

Though she could no longer see it well, the attacks seemed to be of a kind that even she couldn’t withstand, making it all the more difficult for her to believe this situation.

“This is maddening.”

If they were going to attack the wall, the standard would be to take control of the surroundings by attacking first, yet by knocking around the wall like this, it was nothing more than knocking to say, “I’m here,” which put her in a dilemma.

At any moment, if the atmosphere turned hostile, strange beings called heroes would swarm and launch another attack, which would be impossible for her to handle alone, and even if she prepared, she wasn’t sure what would happen, leading her to groan.

Having already lost two and with one dead, she was receiving unfriendly gazes, so she tried to be a bit prudent.

If she died, what use would the reward be?

“…d*mn it, how are you still alive?”

Just d*e already, she spat out those words in her mind and scratched her head. Then she reached out toward the monsters.

She thought it would be better to let a few cause chaos here while she executed a diversion elsewhere.

—

Why-y-y-y!

The shrill sound of the siren filled the building. In that moment, a hero who had been watching me rushed toward me in surprise.

The detention cell door swung open.

“Student! I don’t know about anything else, but we need to evacuate now!”

“Y-yes…?”

I raised my head as I lay powerless on the ground.

“Hurry! The Barrier has started to crack, so we need to evacuate to a safe place! I’ve heard you’re an Academy student, but if you’ve fought like that, do you still have any fight left in you?”

It’s better to rest since I’m tired, the staff’s words left me dumbfounded.

I tried to get up, but at that moment, a sudden thought made me stop in my tracks again.

“What are you doing? I told you we need to go! Once it’s safe, you can come out again…!”

“Kanna, Kanna… where is Kanna…? K-Kanna is escaping with me, right?”

“Ugh, who on earth is this Kanna? If you stay here, the Association people will take care of you!”

As they led me toward a safe place, I thought this wasn’t the time to be doing this.

“Excuse me, but I think I need to join the Academy…”

“What? Look at this mess, and you’re talking about the Academy… I mean you were stuck here, and if you come out, you’ll have to go back again? Stop talking nonsense and hurry! You’re a student, so we didn’t put handcuffs on you!”

“…But.”

What on earth should I say for them to listen?

No, but aren’t we already accomplices?

Of course, if they blocked the information from above, the lower ranks wouldn’t know, but I was a person belonging to that organization, and with limited information, it was possible to restrict me even without ill intentions.

Hence, this situation felt deeply resentful to me.

But that didn’t mean I could cause a ruckus like earlier. There was no one around to threaten me to guide me, and even if I did, I realized that I wouldn’t be allowed to reach there without knowing where it was, which almost brought me to tears.

No, wait a minute.

No matter how limited my abilities were, it wasn’t that bad of a situation right now.

As soon as I thought of that, I recalled the ability I had used to find Kanna at some point.

If I went home and retrieved things related to Kanna, it would be easier to find her, but that would be too late, so I gathered my strength to find whatever was around me.

Sigh.

I took a small breath. For now, I pretended to follow the staff’s words, but my gaze was directed through the glass window embedded in the hallway.

Is she in the building across? Or is she in this building’s basement? Would the basements be all connected?

The method was simple.

Even though there were countless stars scattered across the sky, they each had their place and respective constellations, so I just needed to recall where she should be and connect the stars.

Having lived closely with Kanna for a long time, it would be even simpler.

I clenched my fist tightly. I took a deep breath and softly closed my eyes.

Thud, thud. As I closed my eyes, the quiet footsteps tickled my ears. And in an instant, I felt something shining.

“Ugh.”

As I swallowed my breath, the hero leading the way turned their head towards me. In that moment, I felt sudden guilt as I remembered that I had just pressed a weapon to the neck of someone who had only been doing their job.

But now, if they would just let me go, I wouldn’t cause any harm, so I cautiously opened my mouth.

“…What’s going on?”

“I, I really need to go to a certain place.”

“Where? This is the Association building. I can’t allow you to go messing around as you please.”

At that moment, I glared at my opponent with a cold, hardened expression.

“…All the heroes have been summoned to the scene, right? You should evacuate to safety quickly.”

I pointed out that there was no one nearby to help, and that I was standing right in front of them. It seemed the floor beneath my feet cracking caught their eye.

“G-go, go.”

The staff took a step back, showing resignation and empty hands, and I stepped forward with determination.

Ch. 118 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 118

The staff’s report and the CCTV footage pointed to Yoon Hamin. The uninvited guest rummaging through the building wasn’t welcome, but given the circumstances, there weren’t many who could stop Yoon Hamin.

If the opponent were an ordinary person, it would be a matter of using the body techniques learned at the Academy to subdue them. However, if the opponent was an Awakened One and a Hero, wielding their abilities and causing chaos, the difficulty of subduing them escalated significantly, making it a troublesome issue.

Moreover, if that person weren’t just another student, but an Ability user occupying the position of Top Student, it made the situation even more complicated.

The executives were initially positioned in a safe place, so there was no real reason to flee. They simply needed to directly face the situation and give orders on how to proceed.

However, it was undeniable that they were in a difficult situation.

A crack in the Barrier had just begun to form, and they needed to allocate personnel to that area, yet it was unclear how to stop this one individual from wreaking havoc within the Association’s building.

The executive, Chei, contemplated briefly upon receiving the report. That thought didn’t linger for long before he reached a conclusion.

[Is there a Hero nearby who can handle this? Please ensure that they don’t step into the confidential areas of the Association or restricted zones for outsiders. Also, if possible, please expel them from the Association building. I have little attention to spare on that student in the current situation.]

As he communicated through the contact network, the electronic document report he had received remained firmly in his grasp.

A report on Kanna.

There had been no significant response obtained, and in the urgent situation where the Barrier could collapse, they had left her unattended in a place without a proper destination to bring her to, having acquired access rights to monitor through CCTV.

With a swift motion, Chei’s hand moved, and the screen changed.

Beyond the stark white space, there was the neck of a girl bound below a vertically connected line. bl**d streamed from her hands, pooling into a dark red puddle, her fingers stuck into the chair, unable to detach.

Her body was not even permitted to droop.

Kanna Aurora had not been granted rest, even in the moment she lost consciousness.

*

With one activation of ability, Kanna could not be found. If one time didn’t work, then it was simple to try twice, and if two didn’t succeed, then try a third time.

As I dashed forward, questioning if this might be the way, I activated the ability again to find the path. Even once I identified the location, I couldn’t run straight towards it, forcing me to scour through the building’s insides as I ran energetically.

The atmosphere began to turn increasingly grim from a certain point onward.

Initially blindingly white, claiming this was merely an institution, the atmosphere transformed into that of a research facility upon reaching the underground.

Naturally, there were no windows since it was underground, and the guiding lines you might see in a large hospital were drawn in various colors on the floor.

Even with the day darkening, my body showed no sign of halting. No, it seemed to insist that I shouldn’t stop.

Finally, I reached an exit, only to find someone blocking the door.

A man in a black suit and gas mask was staring at me. In his hand was a small hammer, making me squint, wondering if he had just been hammering something.

Drip.

Drip.

“…You.”

Standing in front of a person at that moment, a chill ran down my spine. It felt like a shiver had engulfed my entire body.

I attempted to wipe it away, but a drop of bl**d I couldn’t hide had fallen onto the white floor, staining it.

It would be difficult to consider that he was an employee guarding this place. After all, he should have been able to receive treatment at a place closely resembling his own hideout, so there was no reason for him to be standing here.

That meant the bl**d must belong to someone else, and how often might one encounter someone else’s bl**d here?

Knowing that Kanna was over there was a reality I couldn’t accept.

“Did you k*ll her?”

Veins bulged in my neck.

“How did you do it…?”

It felt as if tears were welling up in my eyes.

But all that returned was the sound of breathing through the gas mask. The eyes visible through it bore no emotion.

“How, how did you do it?!”

I tried to hold it together, to endure, but the frustration boiled over, forcing me to unleash my feelings.

The explosion of stars spread in an instant.

No, unlike earlier, a slightly lesser explosion indicated my diminishing ability.

Kanna, are you still alive?

Please say you are. Say that my weakening power is because you are alive.

Of course, it’s sad that being close means my power decreases, preventing me from protecting you, but right now, I just want to know if you’re alive or dead.

Please answer. Though my voice may not reach you, I hope this can be the sign.

It’s okay if I weaken. I’ll try harder.

Swallowing hard, I summoned my magical power to its maximum.

The magic within me transformed into my ability in an instant, and my empty body opened a passage to accept new magical energy.

In this narrow path created solely for this door, the man blocking my way merely stared at me blankly.

As lights flared and the lines connected and disconnected in rapid succession, signaling explosions and flickers, his eyes did not flinch.

“Get out of the way. Before I k*ll you.”

I glared at my opponent, grinding my teeth.

Yet, he did not blink and merely raised the hammer.

My gaze fixated on his right hand.

And in that moment, a shock swept past as it struck my shoulder.

My body was flung against the wall opposite me.

*

Breathing was difficult. It felt like someone was gripping my throat.

I wanted to rest, but my body ached, making it hard to move.

“Cough.”

I coughed from the sensation choking my throat, but even that wouldn’t come out easily.

As sensation slowly returned, I tried to rub my eyes awake, but my hands wouldn’t budge.

As consciousness reached my fingertips, I finally realized that my fingers were fixed somewhere and wouldn’t move.

At the same time, a persistent sting continued.

As the sting built up, it soon escalated into pain.

What started as a prickling sensation turned into a throbbing ache, and I grimaced with my still heavy eyelids.

Not even allowed movement from my wrist to my fingers left me quite uncomfortable.

And there was something that had been preventing me from lowering my head since earlier: the rough touch of a string around my neck.

Curious about what this could be, I managed to open my eyes.

How much sleep dust was there? I briefly complained, only to realize that it was indeed my tears that had dried.

The noose that encircled my neck led straight to the ceiling.

Not being able to lower my head any further and only able to glance down, I finally understood why my hands couldn’t move.

“Oh, ohhhh!”

Right, my mind was hazy for a moment, causing me to forget.

I remembered where I was and what was happening to me.

Oh, ohhh.

It hurts, it hurts; I truly did nothing wrong.

I wanted to speak those things, but why did this happen?

Where did everyone go? If you’re going, please let me go.

But coming back is scary again.

I began to understand what it means to lose one’s sanity.

Something surfaced in my mind, and along with it, I found another part of me hoping for something contrary.

For now, I managed to catch my breath and calm down, lifting my chin.

Even though I couldn’t move, I could only think about how malicious it was to have something like this around my neck.

With a weak tug, I turned my gaze back to my hands.

It felt like tears would spill out from the pain.

Now that my hands were fixed to the chair, even the slightest movement causing the chair to rattle felt like agony.

If only my other hand were free; I would have tried to pull out the nails somehow or at least loosen my belt to seek a way out, but that was impossible.

From the start, escaping from here felt like rebellion and treachery, making it hard to breathe.

Why did everyone leave?

Where did they go? Did they go to eat?

No, had it turned night while I was unconscious?

Anything would be fine. Somebody save me.

I’m scared. I don’t want to be trapped in a place like this.

Save me.

It hurts; I feel like I’m going to cry.

No, they’ve already flowed, dried, and hardened.

The tears that had dried on my cheek tickled me, and I couldn’t even wipe them away.

“Ugh…”

I finally put my foot down.

Though my feet were tied up at the chair’s front legs, I thought I could balance myself and stand up somehow.

Trembling, I stood on my toes.

It seemed my body lifted along with the chair, but soon, I wobbled and crashed to the floor.

At that moment, a strong shock coursed through my body, and I screamed.

“AAAAAAAAAAH!”

The impact was followed immediately by pain radiating through my fingers.

The pain of my fingers being crushed made my teeth clench.

“Ugh, huff… it hurts, it hurts…”

No one answered my cry.

My voice echoed in the empty space, making me even more miserable.

Yet, after calming down to some extent, I thought lying here was far more comfortable.

After contending with pain numerous times, I managed to lie down somewhat comfortably.

I wish for the pain to stop.

I don’t like pain.

I want it to end.

I’m suffering. I’m sad. I’m lonely.

I want to go back and eat the food Hamin made.

I wonder if Hamin is doing well.

Is he sleeping soundly?

Is he looking for me?

I hope so.

Ch. 119 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 119

The starlight always steadfastly maintains its place.

Although it may not be visible to people’s eyes at times, the stars have always held their position, merely hidden somewhere.

That’s why Yoon Hamin was able to use his abilities even during the day, or when it was raining.

However, he could not prevent the power of the stars from weakening.

Obstacles that blocked the light came to him like obstacles.

Yet those obstacles did not greatly disturb him or seem like a problem.

After all, night would return, and the clouds would eventually clear.

Even if thunder and lightning struck and rain poured down, it would clear up again.

Yoon Hamin questioned inwardly the fact that his abilities did not work as well when he was near Kanna.

It seemed like it hadn’t been that way at first, but suddenly he became aware that it subtly wasn’t working from a certain point, causing him to tilt his head.

Now, having been pushed aside after taking a hit on the shoulder, he had no time to think about such things.

“d*mn…”

Yoon Hamin cursed under his breath.

A man wielding a hammer stood directly in his way, not only blocking him but also exuding the ability of an Awakened One.

How wonderful it would have been if he had a kn*fe.

He thought so, but he knew that bringing a kn*fe into such a place would never be permitted, so he could only let out a deep sigh.

“……”

He simply breathed heavily through the gas mask, without saying a word.

There was no intent to k*ll.

He was not standing here to k*ll someone.

But ironically, that fact only stirred Yoon Hamin more.

The absence of intent to k*ll felt like he was acting as a puppet, moving on someone’s orders, injuring, striking, and blocking others, and it was frustrating to the point that it made him angry.

He was desperate because he had to protect someone, he wanted to do so.

But because he was strong, he was crudely used, and because he was an adult, his opinions were dismissed.

Everything was arbitrarily judged and decided, trampling on someone’s life, making him grind his teeth in disbelief.

After clenching his teeth, Yoon Hamin tightened his fists.

He had no desire to k*ll anyone.

But if the person in front of him had harmed Kanna, the story would be different.

Even if he wanted to k*ll, he probably couldn’t do it. He understood that doing so in reality was the problem.

Even so, he thought about stepping up to the point right before killing.

With a powerful thud echoing, he took a step forward.

He clenched his fists tightly, trying to draw on the power of the stars.

At the same time, the man in the gas mask also took a step forward.

With a dull sound as a signal, the distance between them quickly closed.

Could he win?

That didn’t matter.

Was persuasion impossible?

If there was no persuasion or dialogue, only strength would remain.

He knew Kanna was alive, but if Kanna had to suffer,

if this was truly the path and choice for humanity, was he prepared to turn his back on that choice?

Yoon Hamin smiled at the question he posed to himself.

For a thousand people to d*e in an accident.

Everyone points out and chooses one person to d*e in their stead.

How could the value of that life be the same?

d*ath by chance was unfortunate, but d*ath by choice was, after all, someone’s m*rder and complicity.

He was not unaware of the Association’s opinion.

If this continued, and the barriers fell, and people suffered, they would try to minimize that suffering, so what could he say about it?

But if their efforts were like this, he could only deny it.

Thus, Yoon Hamin raised his magical power to the point that the taste of bl**d lingered in his mouth.

“Uaaaah!”

He had never once thought about wanting to hit someone.

He had always been among the chosen, so he believed that power should be used for someone else, avoiding anger or causing friction.

But at this moment, Yoon Hamin wanted to shatter everything.

The adults who dismissed all opinions, thinking he was young.

The grand opinion that insisted Kanna had to be dealt with because she posed a danger to humanity.

It would have been easy to hit the man who might have swung the hammer at Kanna.

Yet, the opponent Yoon Hamin was challenging was not someone with a tangible presence, nor was it a target that he could hit by swinging his fists.

Even so, Yoon Hamin swung his fist.

His fist struck the face of the man in the gas mask.

The fist of the man in the gas mask also struck Yoon Hamin’s face.

After that, they unleashed their powers, inflicting greater damage on each other.

Bang.

After a sound so large it made one question if it truly came from a human’s fist, Yoon Hamin found himself bleeding from his nose.

He stumbled and looked ahead.

His right eye was bloodshot, and his jaw felt numb and swollen.

He could hear a ringing in his ear, but the same went for the left side of the face of the man in the gas mask.

Due to the strong blow he dealt, was he out of breath? The sound coming through the gas mask became denser.

“Ha…”

So, he was not weak.

This felt definitely different from before.

No, since he did not look like a hero, was he someone who was separately tasked by the Association?

Various thoughts crossed Yoon Hamin’s mind.

And again, he tightened his fist.

If he was going to quit because it hurt, he wouldn’t have started in the first place.

After taking a deep breath, he tightened his fist again.

Now that he knew the extent of the opponent’s blows, he was genuinely ready to hit.

The moment he stomped the ground, the man in the gas mask rushed in with his hammer.

It seemed he thought he didn’t need to face someone barehanded just because the opponent was unarmed.

Yoon Hamin didn’t stop even after capturing that with his eyes.

He twisted his fist from the right to the left to slam the hammer aside.

“Guh!”

Condensation and then explosion.

One of the common sights of the stars.

The moment his fist collided with the hammer, he triggered that explosion.

In an instant, everything around felt hot, followed by a blinding flash of an explosion.

The hammer transformed from a simple piece of metal to a heated, red-hot lump of iron.

And in keeping with its appearance, as it fell to the ground, it distorted and made a thudding sound.

Yoon Hamin didn’t stop at that and stepped forward with his right foot.

His heavy left fist dug right into the side of the man in the gas mask.

Simultaneously, another explosion occurred.

“Guh! Ugh!”

No matter how much he exhaled roughly, it was the first sound of groaning to come from a man who had been like a beast that spoke not a word.

No matter how he tried to hide it, it seemed he couldn’t help but succumb to unbearable pain, as he was human after all.

Yoon Hamin seized that moment and struck the face of the man losing his balance with his opposite fist.

The opponent regained his composure and tried to throw a counterpunch, but how precise could a punch thrown abruptly be?

A punch grazed past Yoon Hamin's left ear, causing a wave, but that impact did not inflict any harm on Yoon Hamin.

He simply had to be hit by a fist while wearing a gas mask.

With a staggering sound, the man collapsed in front of Yoon Hamin.

"Haah, haah."

A pounding heart.

Adrenaline flowed through Yoon Hamin, making him feel ecstatic.

The fact that he had used his abilities against another human for the first time felt surreal, but he believed the man who had blocked him was in the wrong and stared at the fallen man.

Kanna was definitely in front of him…

Yoon Hamin's vision blurred.

The result of struggling to use his abilities with unprecedented efficiency returned to him.

It felt similar to when Kanna had collapsed after forcibly squeezing out her powers.

However, a foreign sensation overtook Yoon Hamin.

"…No, this can't…"

Steady your will. He could not fall yet.

Until he brought Kanna out of this building, until he escaped to a safe place.

Thinking that way, the moment he stumbled and made his way forward, and just as his hand touched the door, he heard the sound of other staff approaching from behind.

No matter how hazy his mind became, he could not view this situation as anything but urgent.

Anxious, Yoon Hamin hastily rattled the locked door to open it.

When it didn’t open, he had to use his abilities to force it open.

He might not have known what would happen if he exhausted his magical power, but could he really back off now?

Having come this far, he aimed to see Kanna’s face and rescue her if he had the strength, so he had no choice but to move forward.

The moment his power pierced through the hinge and ripped the door off its hinges, a bright white space came into view beyond.

Strange machines were arranged in a circle around a certain point, and he saw someone lying among them.

“…Kanna.”

Yoon Hamin’s voice was filled with exhaustion.

His staggering footsteps moved forward.

And just a few steps in, Yoon Hamin’s eyes widened.

“This can’t be…”

This can’t be happening.

His hoarse voice trailed off.

In a situation visible from afar, Kanna’s wrists and ankles were secured to the chair with belts.

Even a noose hovered in the air, around her fingers, around her fingers.

Seeing that scene only brought to mind the idea of disgusting humans.

Was it truly human to bring someone to this state?

As he gritted his teeth, he couldn’t turn his head completely, but Kanna, integrated with the chair, turned her voice toward him.

“…Hamin, Yoon Hamin…?”

Kanna asked, hoping she hadn’t misheard.

Had she remained seated, she wouldn’t have had to awkwardly turn around, but since she ended up lying with the chair, it was regrettable that she couldn’t properly turn to look.

“Kanna…! Ugh!”

The moment Yoon Hamin took a weary step, hands that subdued him approached from behind.

With a crash, Yoon Hamin was pushed to the ground, and three people wearing gas masks sat on top of him, restraining him.

Then another person exhaled through the gas mask and spoke.

“—Take him away.”

Ch. 120 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 120

Three strong men pinned Yoon Hamin down. One final voice pulled him away.

Yoon Hamin tried to struggle, but the weight of the three men pinned him down, and his body could not move at all.

“Let go…!”

He tried to unleash his ability, but felt as if he were trying to reach out in a place where communication was cut off, just like before.

His arms were crossed behind him and he was subdued.

Kanna could only hear the situation; she couldn’t see it, so it was a moment filled with terror.

She realized that the voice she thought was a hallucination was, in fact, real.

Yoon Hamin had come to save her, and for a moment, she harbored the ridiculous hope that others were about to free her.

However, as Yoon Hamin rushed in only to be subdued himself, she grew anxious hearing his desperate voice.

The thought of where they might drag him off frightened her.

Yoon Hamin must not d*e like this. If he were to d*e, it would be better if she died instead.

She didn’t know much else, but she understood this.

It was the only way everyone could be happy.

That included Yoon Hamin’s happiness.

Therefore, before she could be saved, it was more important that Yoon Hamin not suffer.

So Kanna made her choice, closing her eyes tightly.

“…Come and save me!”

That was the form of the monsters Kanna was familiar with.

She wanted to tell Yoon Hamin that he had been controlled from the very beginning, that even coming this far was not his will but rather an irresistible force.

She wondered if this would even resonate.

In truth, she felt it was wrong to involve Yoon Hamin as well.

But anyway, nothing would change by just staying still.

If they were going to part like this, if they would be isolated and never meet again, then what did it matter if this was their farewell?

In fact, she wanted to remain a good person in Yoon Hamin’s memory.

When Hamin thought of her, she wanted him to think she was really kind. She wished he would remember that it was good when they were together.

Saying this without consultation might make Yoon Hamin feel betrayed, but she couldn’t help it.

One of them had to d*e.

Kanna thought this way as she made her decision.

It had to be her.

The world needed Yoon Hamin.

They feared those involved with monsters like Kanna, those who bore unrefined magical power and lived like monsters.

Those who harmed the barriers and threatened humanity would be hated even more.

So, since it had come to this, Kanna shouted one last time, exclaiming, “You useless b*stard…!”

It was a choked, painful voice.

If someone were to hear, they would likely think it was a monster in pain from a failed operation.

But Yoon Hamin knew.

Even before losing his memory, even after losing it, Kanna was not someone who would say such things to him.

That was why his eyes opened wide.

Kanna told him to go far away, not to harm Yoon Hamin, and to simply distance himself from her, and now she wept as if it were all over.

Lying sideways, her tears ran down her face and dripped onto her temples.

“You can’t even do that right!”

“Shut up!”

As Kanna squeezed out the words, a man in a gas mask shouted at her.

Kanna’s mouth shut instinctively in fear, and Yoon Hamin shivered quietly beneath the weight of the others.

The question of why Kanna was doing this felt foolish.

She nearly could have been protected this way before, as other staff had briefly made her believe so based on their testimony.

She tried to speak up.

But Yoon Hamin was in pain, feeling powerless and unable to do anything in this moment.

Even being dragged out by the three people was agonizing, leaving him at a loss.

*

The moment the door slammed shut, a footstep was heard.

When the noisy sounds disappeared, it became evident that Yoon Hamin had been dragged beyond the soundproof wall.

While she was worrying, someone who appeared to be leftover staff approached her with a heavy sigh and lifted the chair.

As she moved, pain shot through her hand, prompting a few tears to escape, but there was no time to cry over such things now.

Earlier, they hadn’t said a word, their emotions not even apparent like a doll, but now they were a terrifying person who sighed and shouted.

No, was it really this person who screamed?

But seeing their clear emotional expression…

“Loosening it makes it easier to move, huh?”

With a click of the tongue, they dragged her along with the chair.

The rope that had been placed before she lay down was now lying there.

Then, they pulled the rope, placing it around her neck.

“Ugh, ugh… cough.”

As the rope tightened, it barely allowed her to breathe.

The man took a hammer out of a box.

Then, he squatted down in front of her.

“If you had just sat still, everything would have been fine. Why do you keep bothering the higher-ups?”

The hammer flew down, striking her foot before she could even say stop.

“Ugh! Ugh!”

She bit down hard and tried to endure the pain, but it felt like her molars were cracking.

It felt as if her teeth were grinding against each other.

Somehow managing to endure the pain, she squeezed her eyes shut and held her hands tight, but instead, the wound that had temporarily stiffened opened up again and started to bleed.

“Ow, ugh, it hurts, it hurts…”

“Then you should have stayed still.”

Bang!

“Ugh, ugh!”

She was struck multiple times.

I’m going to d*e; I feel like I’m going to d*e.

My feet feel crushed. I feel like my bones are breaking.

Am I already so broken that I can’t even say anything?

No, it seems like I’m already screaming, but my consciousness is so distant that I can barely hear it.

I’m in agony; I want to live. But I don’t want to hurt. I’d rather d*e like this than face more pain.

I don’t want this, I don’t want this, I don’t want this.

The heavy sounds echoed again and again.

Her feet had become a mess, and she couldn’t put any strength into them anymore.

Her hands and feet had become trash, and she began to question the difference between what monsters do and what humans do.

“Hehe, hehehehe.”

Everything is wrong.

It seemed strange laughter was escaping from her lips.

*

How much time had passed?

When she regained some awareness, the rope tightening around her neck greeted her once more.

No, it had been there all along, but as she regained her senses, she felt the pain and annoyance once more.

“Cough… cough…”

Her throat felt strangled.

It wasn’t just that she was having trouble breathing; the sensation of bl**d pooling made her mind hazy.

With the rushing bl**d flow, it felt like her eyes might burst at any moment.

Perhaps it would be better if she died.

If not, she might have been more acutely aware of the painful throbbing in her feet.

The rope clutching her neck was attached to the ceiling, and her body was fastened to the chair.

As if wanting to separate her head from her body, she struggled under the pull.

In such a state, screaming was impossible, and she could only make noises by scratching her neck while dying.

When her fingers began to bleed, the nosebleed that had flowed from being hit stayed for a while before ceasing.

Her body throbbed with bruising from rolling over when the chair tipped.

Her focus was fading.

Rather than enduring this pain, it might be better to d*e.

Now, she wouldn’t have to be near Yoon Hamin anymore.

She had never been able to do anything alone, but the moments when Yoon Hamin was next to her would always be unforgettable.

They might feel like false memories, but to her, they marked some level of achievement.

Her feet had long been smashed by the hammer, and her nails had turned into nails.

At the mercy of vague tightness that neither killed nor allowed respite, she gasped for breath.

If it could be called a fatal wound, that was not the case.

It was merely the agony of slowly perishing.

A torture that seemed to eat away at her very sanity.

“Ugh, ugh, cough.”

The pain felt like her eyes were about to pop out, but even before that, tears flowed.

Tears rolling down her cheeks tickled her face.

If only someone would make this easier for her, would this strangling rope appear like a lifeline?

Yet the world was so cruel it wouldn’t allow that.

I’m struggling. I’m in pain.

k*ll me. I don’t want to live.

Save me. I don’t want to d*e.

I was wrong. Please save me. Stop this, please.

No, I haven’t done anything wrong.

Stop, stop, ah, ah.

When the lack of oxygen began making her struggle for breath, the rope around her neck loosened slightly, as if water was being poured over her head.

“Agh, gasp…!”

She had no idea how much time had passed.

Being trapped in this pure white space, she had long lost her sense of time.

It seemed they had no intention of feeding her or letting her sleep.

Again and again.

Through the haze of her mind, she saw a syringe being stuck into her arm.

“…Huh.”

Soon after, a small question was asked.

“Please tell me what your real relationship with Yoon Hamin is. Are you the one who truly controlled him? Or just a friend?”

“…Heh.”

I never did anything wrong.

I didn’t mess up.

So.

“You useless b*stard…”

This is my true nature.

From now on, I’ve decided it to be so.

I hope Hamin can become a hero unbound by someone like me.

A hero shining brighter than anyone, like a star.

I earnestly wished for that.

And in that moment, amidst the daze, a colossal noise resonated.

A huge bang, as if a massive door had flown forward from behind, real enough for her to see.

“…Never say that again.”

Yoon Hamin’s voice, about to break into tears, enveloped her.

Ch. 121 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 121

After being dragged out, Yoon Hamin had to feel helpless. He had to deeply realize that he was such an incompetent being.

Yoon Hamin couldn’t just let Kanna, who had chosen to appear like a monster instead of persuading him and saying he was just being used, wrap herself in her own excuses.

He knew it was all a lie; he knew it was not what she truly wanted to say, yet the words calling him a worthless piece of trash kept echoing in his mind.

Locked in a detention cell that seemed sturdier than before, he had to repeatedly think while receiving several form of surveillance.

Worthless piece of trash. Why can’t I even do this properly? With Kanna saying things like that, what am I even doing?

No matter how much I want to do what I intend, life doesn’t allow it. But isn’t it too pathetic to just sit still saying that’s how life is?

Just like Kanna did at the beginning, I couldn’t stop even though I was alone, I had to ask the teacher and even ask myself with a sense of desperation.

Yeah, even if I was dragged out, as long as Kanna’s position doesn’t change, I could find her again.

But how? My abilities are weakened; how am I supposed to get closer to Kanna?

Everything was going as bad as it could be for him—his abilities, the situation.

But even so, he hoped.

He wished to be close even though light would fade away. He knew that he would definitely lose his color, yet if he continued like this, he would merely be covered.

He thought he couldn’t stop because he believed it was the right thing to do.

Then at the end of it, he recalled the words Kanna once told him. To become a being like a star, to be a star.

For Kanna, that would have been a last will; how she must have felt giving what felt like advice until the very end came to mind.

Surely that’s the key to some event.

The current Kanna, who was aware of the future to some extent. Orca thought she would lose her powers and was starting to devise plans for the future, even suggesting that Kanna learn magic separately.

So then it wasn’t entirely hopeless. If this could also be a solution to something.

But he couldn’t quite understand what it meant to become a star. That advice seemed so vague it felt like grasping at clouds.

But finally, Yoon Hamin recalled.

“…Ah.”

The ability of the star he had used countless times. He thought he knew it to some degree.

An ability he normally wouldn’t use. It was only when he reached the end that it was usable, so it was natural that he hadn’t thought of it.

Shining light, condensing it, exploding it, connecting it, severing it—moments of flicker repeating over and over. And during those moments, there was something that stars continuously repeated.

Knowing it was indispensable, he never even considered it a reckless approach to use it as an ability.

Yet Kanna considered this to be the solution.

Could it be the way to finally defeat the monster?

‘…Because I want you to smile.’

No, it was that Kanna wanted to make someone smile; a plan she prepared for Yoon Hamin.

And the moment he realized this, Yoon Hamin’s eyes widened, and he held his breath. He wanted to run immediately beyond the bars that blocked him in the detention cell.

So he stood up.

As he rustled, the staff members sharply turned their heads, and Yoon Hamin dashed in and broke the bars.

*

A pain that felt like his body was burning enveloped him. It didn’t really burn, but it was a sensation he couldn’t avoid, as he was drawing strength at the cost of some life force.

Speaking of life force, it felt like some of his lifespan was being shaved off, yet the stars themselves repeatedly condense and explode, generating heat, and were busy flaunting their endless vitality.

So this much was to be expected.

He burns himself to shine light. Even if that might be his future.

If he just stayed like this, the future was only dark and gloomy.

He couldn’t just sit and watch. Remaining still in such a situation would merely prove how useless and powerless he was.

I am not that way. I have no intention or heart to stop here. I will move forward to protect Kanna and bring her back.

With that one thought, he took a step.

There was a rope that seemed like it would hang around a person’s neck, but it shouldn’t have been. The monsters that lived here bound hands and feet with belts as if to become one with the chair, and as if that wasn’t enough, they pierced nails into fingers.

He thought it was disgusting.

What is human, what is a monster?

To him, everyone seemed like a monster.

He didn’t want to rationalize anything. He had no guilt about pressing down on people in the future.

He spat out his strength with a crash. He could still feel some restraint, but he no longer needed to forcibly draw magic like before.

He felt freer than anyone.

Shooting out abilities without any restrictions of magic must be the privilege of a star.

“Cough!”

“d*e, please, just d*e.”

He grabbed the man in the gas mask blocking the door and swung his fist several times. He struck down until his face was shattered, his nose flattened, and the gas mask was torn.

Seeing the person gradually being pulverized into a bloody mass made him sigh. He then kicked the door aside.

With a loud explosion from kicking the door, he gazed at Kanna beyond it.

“…Really, don’t ever… speak like that again.”

Those were words directed at Kanna. Yet Kanna remained in silent stillness, even with such a ruckus happening.

Finding it strange, he lifted his gaze to where Kanna was. At the same time, standing in front of Kanna was another man in a gas mask holding a syringe.

“—How the hell.”

He first cut the rope around Kanna’s neck, and then he charged towards the masked man.

That man also likely had abilities. But more importantly, it was essential to release the emotions he held inside.

He didn’t hope for that person to live a proper life after doing this to Kanna.

Even if he wished, he would thoroughly crush that hope so it wasn’t a significant issue.

Without saying a word, he swung his fist. At that moment, a flash erupted from his fist, illuminating the area. The shimmering, flickering mass of light quickly dyed his opponent in black and white and delivered a strong impact.

It made the man’s clothes tattered and caused him to spit bl**d.

“Cough!”

With thick bl**d filling the gas mask, it became hard for him to breathe, prompting him to take it off.

Through the dripping bl**d, green hair appeared.

“…d*mn, it wasn’t this level of power before…”

“I want to k*ll you, but that feels wrong, so I’ll just beat you to the point where you can’t live normally.”

“Cough! Cough!”

He didn’t particularly want to talk. He merely wanted him to brace himself.

He infused a bit of power with each blow.

He kept hitting until the man’s face turned into a bloody mess. Until his fists were bruised, he aimed to hit him as much as possible.

He hoped all his teeth would be shattered to the point he couldn’t chew anything, that his ears would be deaf, and that his nose would be crushed into a strange face. He wished his bones would be broken such that he couldn’t hold anything or walk.

With such thoughts while clenching his fists, he wondered if he was truly a hero.

No, he wasn’t heroic. It might have been thinking more like a criminal than a hero.

But it was fine now. Even if he couldn’t become a hero, he could be satisfied if he could stand by Kanna’s side.

“Grah…”

Leaving the severely damaged man behind, he approached Kanna, who remained in a stupor.

“…Kanna, I’m here.”

He staggered toward Kanna.

Ivory skin and violet eyes. He removed the rope around her neck and struggled to undo the belts binding her, which gruesomely pierced her

fingers.

“Crazy bastards…”

Thinking he would untie her hand later, he lowered his gaze. He decided to free her feet first, reaching for the belt, only to realize her feet were crushed.

He had struck them several times with a hammer, and they lay twisted and swollen, abandoned with fractures.

With such feet, it was doubtful she could even stand, let alone walk. He wondered why they had gone so far for something that left her toes horrifically mangled and stained with bl**d.

“Kanna…”

Even if he untied her, she couldn’t walk out. How was he supposed to get her hands free anyway?

As he called Kanna’s name, she tilted her head.

“Hamin…? Did Hamin come because he hated me…?”

Her voice appeared somewhat dazed, causing his eyes to widen. Did she lose her memory from being close to d*ath, receiving that unbearable pain? He felt as if he couldn’t breathe.

Yet he realized that wasn’t the case.

That strange syringe beside her—he didn’t know what it was, but it clearly had made Kanna dazed.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry… I didn’t really mean it…”

Kanna apologized to him, tears flowing from her eyes.

“Goodbye.”

“Kanna, this isn’t an illusion…”

He wiped away her tears. As he lightly brushed the bloodstains from her philtrum, Kanna opened her eyes wide.

“Uh, uh…”

A dumbfounded voice escaped her lips, and her lips began to tremble.

“Why…?”

There was a question in her eyes. The swollen lips tugged at his heart.

He whispered in response to her question.

“So you won’t be in pain…”

The stars shine light upon the night sky, waiting for the sun to arrive. Because you are like my sun, he couldn’t bring himself to say such heat-inducing words.

Swallowing down the overwhelming emotions while gazing at Kanna, she smiled brightly.

“Hehe, ah, I’m not in pain. Hamin, are you okay…?”

“…I’m fine, nothing matters.”

Nothing matters. Compared to you.

Ch. 122 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 122

There were six members of the association. Although they were referred to as the association leaders, their opinions did not always align.

It would be good if they agreed, but if they did not, the majority would prevail.

However, there were certainly those who wanted their opinions to be overlooked.

There were individuals who moved with the mindset of, “I am right, and even if you oppose me, I will proceed.” One of the members among the six operated this way and carved out their own path.

One member believed that they should continue experimenting numerous times, turning their back on those who were gripped by fear and secluded in corners, refusing to advance in a state of peace.

“Jerome, it seems that it is unreasonable to continue with this work.”

There was someone trying to dissuade such a member.

That someone was none other than the head of the prominent family that managed the wall, the Lamiris family.

He was the father of Orca and displayed features strikingly similar to hers with his shiny golden hair and blue eyes filled with concern.

In his hands were thick reports and forms, and Jerome let out a groan at his words.

Soon, the worry returned as an answer.

[No. It is precisely at times like this that we must proceed more quickly.]

“…I do believe in your words wholeheartedly, but this is a chaotic time, and I am also concerned about our financial state from repeatedly rebuilding the wall.”

[Do not worry about finances. I will take care of that. I will not be taking funds from taxes as you are concerned, just prepare for the business.]

However, the documents that Lamiris faced were no ordinary papers.

Of course, sitting in the council member’s position, one could assume there would be a certain amount of money, but wasn’t this figure astronomical?

Any business within this wall would immediately retreat if they saw the scope of the funds required for this project.

Nevertheless, there was no particular reason for Jerome’s firm push.

“…Well, should I call you a four-dimensional thinker?”

The head of the Lamiris family let out a hollow laugh upon seeing the large phrase written on the top page of the document.

<Development of Underground Cities in Response to Population Increase within the Barrier>

Humanity had stopped attempting to venture outside the barrier.

It was unavoidable. Merely coming into contact with unrefined magical power could lead to poor condition, and if the concentration or contact time increased, it would inevitably become too overwhelming for most to adapt and they would d*e.

There were devices to go outside the barrier, but they were not universal enough to be supplied widely, and even if one were to go out with such

devices, there would be no magical power to fend off monsters, rendering them unusable.

Going out without any equipment was impossible. They could go out equipped, but afterward, they could only fight with limited magical power.

This meant that meeting beings that advocated for the outside barrier or monsters would be far from sufficient with that.

Additionally, the number of individuals that could go out was limited, making the expansion of the barrier nearly a dream.

Each of the six council members had their own field of responsibility.

Takas was in charge of politics and research.

Chei handled the academy and educational institutions.

Dwaig managed the veil and air superiority.

Agnol was responsible for the study and utilization of monsters.

Garba dealt with security concerning information.

Lastly, Jerome was the council member overseeing the wall.

Those who had stood in this position for generations aimed to expand the wall.

While it was logical that the population would generally decrease, if proper housing and educational environments were provided, and discrimination in the world was minimized to give them stability, the population would naturally increase.

Outside the barrier, there was no humanity.

Due to that fact, whenever peace arrived, they were busy preparing matters for the continuation of human existence.

Even if there were no attacks, eventually, as the population dwindled, society, cities, and nations could not exist without humans, so it was a fundamental duty.

Jerome pondered over this and simultaneously thought about how wonderful it would be if safety could also be ensured.

After all, heroes would defend against monsters and beings, and for the continuation of humanity, the population needed to increase, and that population could not survive solely in this cramped space, so new ways to increase land needed to be considered.

That thought was directly captured in the document that Lamiris was holding.

Lamiris sighed deeply.

After spending so long merely erecting walls on the ground, suddenly being told to dig was a surprise.

Of course, they had never not dug, but this large-scale endeavor seemed dubious.

And soon, recalling that Jerome would bear all the responsibility and cost, he nodded.

It was for humanity.

If this continued, there could be a struggle for positions, arguing that there was no space.

He didn’t oppose creating a space to migrate before thinking that without homes there was no reason to establish families.

Thinking that even reducing this land would set an example crossed his mind, but everything felt premature, and he attempted to step away from the situation for now.

As he stepped out of his study, he found Orca moving cautiously.

“…Orca.”

Orca was anxious.

At this moment, the fact that Yoon Hamin and Kanna were not reachable was terrifying.

“Ah, father…”

“You don’t look well.”

“I heard there’s a crack in the wall. I wonder what kind of news we will hear this time…”

“Since you say there is no choice, there is nothing for you to worry about. Do not fret. You are certainly intelligent and will do well in the future; I will ensure to pass this on to you.”

Lamiris responded calmly despite Orca’s voice.

Since he had inherited the headship, this was a first for him, and digging through past documents to cope felt a bit clumsy, but he believed that his daughter, who had experienced this once, would surely be able to deal with it better and aimed to do his best in his own affairs.

Orca tried to speak evasively but soon lowered her eyes and stammered.

“Father, I have something urgent to tell you.”

“Speak.”

“…I can’t reach my friends.”

“Friends?”

“Yoon Hamin and Kanna Aurora…”

As Orca cautiously opened her mouth, Lamiris's expression stiffened slightly.

"Kanna Aurora, Kanna Aurora…"

He pondered for a moment about a name he seemed to have heard somewhere.

And immediately recalling which name it was, he sighed.

"Orca, are you…"

Do you want to call someone who puts your father in a difficult position a friend? He wanted to say that, but the words remained unspoken and swallowed.

It couldn't be helped.

No matter how much he was in the position of a father or the head of the family, Orca remained her own person.

He had aimed to raise her correctly and strong, so he hoped she wouldn't make a wrong choice and refrained from saying more.

Orca was anxious, her mind elsewhere.

After witnessing Kanna's prior condition, the sight had stayed in her head, and now that she felt completely distant and unseen, along with the inability to contact her, it only left her feeling lost and frustrated.

The wall had cracked.

It hadn't collapsed, but immediately an order had been issued, and many heroes were converging there.

Even though it was suggested that it might be a diversion strategy and that other locations also needed to be verified, heroes flocking to that area couldn't be helped.

Lamiris pointed out his daughter, Orca, wearing such an expression.

“…If the academy does not call you this time, would you help with the family-led project?”

Normally, Orca would nod her head and reply with a hopeful wish.

But Orca shook her head.

Lamiris looked at her, surprised, and Orca, responding to that reaction, opened her mouth.

“I want to try something different right now.”

“…What about the family’s affairs?”

“I feel like I will regret it if I don’t pursue it now.”

“Regret?”

“…Yes.”

Lamiris hesitated for a moment.

Then, he spoke quickly, filled with the urgency of wanting his daughter to succeed and continue his legacy.

“Orca, this time your father will carry on with the project alongside the council. If this succeeds and is completed, the glory of Lamiris will surely continue. And you will inherit that position. So I want to remind you that if you miss this opportunity and later regret it, it will be too late.”

Orca knew.

She understood how much her father cared for her.

Due to the reason of being the head and because she was the successor of such a position, he had been strict and stern multiple times, but she was not

unaware that it was all for her benefit.

Thus, she had run along the rails her father had laid.

Defeating others in a competitive sense had been Orca’s greatest delight.

Standing before her, with no one ahead and everyone behind her, created the most reassuring situation for her.

Because she had been taught that.

In order to protect someone,

In order to work for someone, one must be better than anyone else.

She grew up hearing that being the best would prevent ridicule while helping others or being accused of providing help beyond her means, driving herself forward over and over again, and this was the first time she stood up on her own feet.

Following along may guarantee stability, with a smooth path ahead, but she chose her own path, believing that if the destination was the same, it wasn’t necessary to walk on the laid tracks.

“I am not afraid of not becoming the head.”

Ch. 123 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 123

“Ah, aaaaah!”

The moment I raised my body as if having a seizure, I felt a hand that grasped me.

The touch instantly evoked a sense of fear, causing my body to start trembling.

I was flailing my arms and legs, struggling to break free when, somehow, a voice caught hold of me.

“Kanna, Kanna! It’s me, Yoon Hamin…!”

At the urgent call, my body seemed to stiffen momentarily.

Hamin? Hamin?

Why is Hamin here?

He must have been taken away. Why is he here?

No, more importantly, where is this place, and why am I here?

My bound hands and feet had been released. There were no restraints holding me back.

The intense pain that felt like being torn apart at my fingertips, the suffering as if my feet were crushed.

And the sensation of my nosebleed that had been flowing down my upper lip still felt vividly real, but the warmth that had surged suddenly cooled, and I thought it was natural for me to slowly suffer and d*e in this state, yet I overcame it and remained alive.

Is it okay to be alive like this?

And Yoon Hamin, with a pleading expression as if asking me to calm down.

Did he save me?

“…Hamin?”

Did he choose me?

I was so happy that he saved me despite my earlier screams to be abandoned that I had no idea what to say.

It must mean he thinks I’m precious.

But he is also that much hated.

He even imitated a monster, yet ended up creating this mess.

He had tried to make me survive and seek a better future, but I came back and kicked it all away; does that even make sense?

What if everyone died because of Yoon Hamin’s choice?

What if the barrier collapsed, and Yoon Hamin was left unable to save those around him?

It’s my fault.

Everything is because of me.

If this world collapses, it’s all my fault…

I have no clue what to do.

“…Why, why…”

I opened my mouth towards Yoon Hamin.

“Why did you do it…?”

“Huh?”

“Why, why did you save me…? I-I definitely… definitely thought of you…!”

As I bit my teeth and shouted like that, Yoon Hamin also reacted, shouting back.

“Then what? Should I just stand by after seeing that?!”

Startled, I closed my mouth and stared blankly at Yoon Hamin.

I had never seen him shout like this, so I felt scared to the point of wanting to hiccup.

Fortunately, I held it back, but that’s that.

“My hands and feet hurt, and I didn’t know what to do. Let’s not go anywhere in the future, okay? Don’t call me a useless piece of trash. I’ll definitely protect you next time. I’m sorry for always saying this but not being able to protect you. Now, really, really…”

Yoon Hamin tightly gripped my hand.

Upon barely coming to my senses, I looked down at my fingertips, which were wrapped in bandages.

It seemed they were all wrapped up, making it impossible to see the condition of my fingers.

Feeling the tightness in my feet seemed to indicate the same for my legs.

The throbbing still remained, but I didn’t feel the thought of unbearable pain.

“…You fool.”

I murmured and finally managed to speak.

“What are you doing…? If you save me, what good is it? I have no place left…”

Tears streamed down my face.

Is this okay? Was this the best I could do? Shouldn’t you have just abandoned me? You could have definitely become a better person; isn’t it all ruined because of me?

I’m sorry. It’s all my fault.

Why did I approach you?

If I had known it was going to turn out like this, I wouldn’t have befriended Yoon Hamin.

Ah, if it were me, I wouldn’t have even become friends with Yoon Hamin.

No, I’m the same me, but the thoughts have changed from then to now, making me keep regretting.

I feel like I’m going to go crazy.

Because Hamin is in danger, everything becomes regretful and worrisome.

But it’s too late now.

Even if I regret it, even if I worry, there’s no turning back now.

Protecting Yoon Hamin has its limits, and if I go back like this, it’s certain that I’m going to face days far more painful than this.

If it’s going to connect, then returning might be better, right?

It would be nice if I could walk back, but my legs were numb, and it was doubtful whether they could support my body, so I could only sigh.

Should I just admit I was wrong after I get caught?

Can I really swear that I won’t manipulate Yoon Hamin anymore?

Then can Yoon Hamin survive?

To be honest, I never thought Yoon Hamin would rush to save me without a second thought, but I could never have imagined he would be this thoughtless.

I had thought he had some level of thought before.

No matter how close we are, it should be common sense to pull back when your life and future are at stake—why can’t I understand that?

I still don’t understand why I kicked away the chance I barely created by imitating a monster.

Yoon Hamin smiled at me as if there was no need for me to understand.

“Right, there’s no place anymore.”

“Really, why are you thinking so carelessly? I-I just want you to be safe…”

“But I don’t want to live like that.”

Yoon Hamin’s smile began to fade slightly.

“Even if there’s a place to be, it’s meaningless if you’re not there. But if you’re there, it means something even without a place.”

“…What, what?”

My eyes widened in surprise at the sudden interruption of his voice.

Meaningless without me? I found myself doubting my ears.

And then Yoon Hamin's voice continued, as if confirming I didn't hear it incorrectly.

"Let's run away."

Where to?

There's no place to be anywhere.

Outside the barrier, there are monsters and beasts, and it's even hard for Yoon Hamin to act.

No matter how much I try to run inside the barrier, I'm still inside it. I might be able to flee to natural terrains like mountains or caves, but there are limits to that lifestyle, and getting caught is just a matter of time.

But in this state, where to go?

I held onto him.

"No, Hamin, let's turn ourselves in even now. I-I lost my strength, and you can say you snapped back to reality. So you can report me. Then you might at least get leniency."

"Do I look like someone who would do that?"

Seeing Yoon Hamin look at me as if he was angry, my mouth automatically shut.

In the moment of the chilled air, Yoon Hamin gently caressed my hand with sad eyes.

"Kanna, I'm honestly sorry that I still haven't regained my memories and that I've put you in this situation without giving you a choice… But I like you."

I swallowed hard at the sudden confession.

What about Orca? That thought crossed my mind, but then I quickly realized something.

Maybe it’s all because I changed everything.

It’s all my fault.

But before I had the chance to respond, Yoon Hamin continued.

“I’m not expecting a response. Right now, I feel like I’m forcefully pushing something on you when there’s no choice left. But it’s something I wanted you to know, that’s why I’m saying it.”

Yoon Hamin’s voice was calm.

It sounded like someone who had made some kind of resolution.

“With you, I could gladly accept being labeled as having betrayed humanity.”

“…No, that can’t be. This shouldn’t happen. Hamin, Hamin, please.”

“Is it living well if I sell you out and thrive?”

I couldn’t properly respond to what Yoon Hamin was saying.

What would I have done if I hadn’t lost my memories?

Even though I can see some of my memories, responding in the same way is nearly impossible.

“There are still cracks in the barrier, so they can’t chase us immediately. So let’s run away once we’ve rested.”

His voice was sad.

And it felt like he was excited, as if he was setting out on some good journey.

“We’ll pack some stuff and head far away. For now, it’s before the warrant, so we’ll take a fast-moving taxi and go far, and when it seems like we’ve gone far enough, we can come back. Then it should be harder for them to find us, right?”

His voice sounded like he was dreaming.

A gentle hand stroked mine.

“Let’s withdraw cash in advance. We can try to solve things in nature as much as possible, and if Kanna really wants something to eat, I can sneak to the market and buy it.”

He was explaining to me how to live if we really had to run away later.

“If, by chance, we become the same body, wouldn’t we be able to live completely outside the barrier?”

And Yoon Hamin’s voice further resonated within me.

What if you, the hope of humanity, the hero everyone needs, end up in a body like a monster—what kind of story would that be?

Even if we run away like this, is it even possible to run away forever?

It’s obvious we’d get caught in less than a year, maybe even in less than half a year, just dragging on without any progress.

“Hamin.”

So I had no choice but to respond to Hamin, who spoke as if he were dreaming.

“So what gets resolved…? I’m not saying not to run away, but we can’t just turn a blind eye. We have to come back at some point…”

“Kanna. No, sometimes there are moments when you have to turn a blind eye completely.”

“No, Hamin, you can definitely solve everything. As long as you can get through the last hurdle, you shouldn’t be afraid of anything.”

“What’s the last? What is it? Why do you keep telling me to throw myself away…!”

It seemed like tears were welling up in Yoon Hamin’s eyes.

“Why, why, why? Why don’t you value yourself? I just want you to laugh, but I still want to ask what you felt when you said that back then. But you can’t answer me… I just feel so frustrated like this…”

I bitterly smiled at Yoon Hamin, who was rambling.

Somehow, it has turned out that I was the one holding Yoon Hamin’s perplexed hand.

I gripped my fingers tightly, to the point of it hurting a little, and told him.

“…You at least have to survive. One of us needs to live, and I’m bound to fail anyway.”

So.

“Take me with you and apologize. Say that the girl lost her strength, that the brainwashing was broken, and you’re sorry, and then send me away. Then it’ll be farewell.”

At those words, Yoon Hamin firmly closed his mouth and left the room.

Then, he soon dragged in a suitcase, starting to pack clothes.

Half of my clothes and Hamin’s were inside.

“?”

Just as I was filled with doubt, Yoon Hamin suddenly picked me up.

“…Let’s just go.”

“Hamin.”

“I won’t listen to what you say.”

“Hamin.”

“I can’t hear anything.”

“Hamin…”

My words lingered in the air.

Carrying me, who couldn’t walk, Hamin looked ahead and said he would go far, far away.

Ch. 124 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 124

What could Yoon Hamin possibly be thinking?

Can I not persuade someone like Yoon Hamin?

Naturally, the fear of being abandoned is terrifying. I didn’t want to face the prospect of suffering alone and dying.

However, is it really right to blindly run away just because I don’t want that?

Is it truly correct to support Hamin, who is trying to escape recklessly and go against this great flow?

I felt afraid that everything would fall apart because of me.

If Hamin makes a different choice because of me, if the barrier gets destroyed again and again because of me, and if Yoon Hamin is left to live alone in this world, isn’t that entirely my responsibility?

It would be unthinkable for someone who should become a hero to fall to the level of a criminal, yet I couldn’t think of a way to persuade Hamin right now.

With my hands and feet broken, I could only be led by Yoon Hamin as he went wherever he wanted to.

I vaguely remembered the memories I had before losing consciousness.

I didn’t know what emotions I held with those thoughts, nor could I properly gauge or be sure of how to act with them, but I still tried my best.

In this state, I couldn’t do anything.

Should I just run away in such an unclear situation?

How is that even possible?

It was clear that the end wouldn’t be good at all. When the time comes that I might really d*e, Yoon Hamin will be isolated, having not received help from anyone.

Could it make any sense for someone who could have been a hero to give up just because of me?

I’m still a first-year student.

I can think about it more.

There is still plenty of time.

Even though each day feels pressing and insufficient to me, Yoon Hamin likely has a bright future ahead, but I couldn’t shake off the guilt of trying to swallow that.

The me before I lost my memory.

Those memories I possessed.

After all, since I am all ‘me,’ I think he will understand this choice.

I can imagine he just thought it was the best option when I acted the way I did before losing my memory.

With that resolution in my heart, I opened my mouth towards Hamin, who was carrying me and dragging my luggage.

“…Hamin, we can’t go on like this.”

“……”

I didn’t intend to repeat that it’s not okay, to abandon him like I did earlier, parrot-like.

Of course, I only thought about it, and Yoon Hamin continued to move forward, responding to my call with silence.

He was truly going to the terminal.

He thought this chaotic situation was the most appropriate time to run away, so his legs were moving swiftly.

I swallowed a sigh.

“Hamin, do you know that if we continue like this, everyone might d*e?”

“…What do you mean?”

“Of course, I appreciate that you’re getting angry for my sake. But, but if we go on like this, the teacher, Orca, and other unknown people will d*e too?”

At my words, Yoon Hamin couldn’t dismiss me coldly as before; instead, he hesitated and furrowed his lips.

“…Everyone will d*e.”

To such a Hamin, I delivered the warning.

“Everyone except you.”

It was a curse, but it was also the truth.

How could I curse Hamin, who I hoped would laugh?

Thinking that this would be the most effective way to persuade Hamin, who intended to flee without a clear objective, I didn’t know if it would actually work.

Right now, I was so overwhelmed that I could only convey my message with words, and I wished this would change Yoon Hamin’s mind.

“I’ll d*e too.”

“Why, why…? Why are you saying such things?”

Hamin’s voice crackled with emotion.

The strength of his stance spoke to his feelings.

I smiled at that question.

“We have to go back. We can’t run away. If we run, we won’t be able to achieve anything. All we can do is watch others d*e. A hero can’t be a hero without someone to protect.”

“I didn’t want to become a hero. I just thought it would be nice to have the strength to fight for someone.”

I know, you are righteous.

How difficult is it for someone with power to make up their mind to fight when they see others suffer?

After all, I felt that fighting for someone else is scary and burdensome, and it certainly seems impossible for me.

Thus, it is something great.

Is it usually easy to run just with a sense of duty?

“…Then, if you run away like this and both d*e, who do you want to protect?”

As I spoke those words, I felt Hamin’s head drop slightly.

I’m sorry. I’m sorry.

I don’t mean to torment you with such harsh words.

But you actually know that this can’t go on, don’t you?

“If we run away like this, no one will survive.”

“…Then what should I do? With this power, I find it hard to even protect you.”

“It’s okay, Hamin.”

I leaned against Hamin’s back.

I stretched my arms out and wrapped them around his neck.

Carried like this, I hugged him tightly from behind.

This was the fullest embrace I could give.

“Then let’s catch the monster first. Let’s target the monster that devoured Hamin’s power. I’ll help you.”

“…Huh?”

Discomfort came through in Hamin’s voice.

Having been busy saying that his current self couldn’t do anything, my suggestion seemed to intrigue him despite the concern.

He didn’t rush off to the terminal dismissively.

Instead, he quietly walked toward a corner, making space for us to talk.

There was a plastic chair that looked abandoned in an alley, and I managed to sit on it for a moment.

I attempted to rise up on my tippy toes, but it seemed my toes from the pain were too serious for me to step down.

The pain was so intense that my expression naturally distorted.

After a small groan, I lifted my head to look at Yoon Hamin, who was waiting for my words with his lips pressed tightly together.

“Hamin, if you need strength, you can just deal with that monster.”

“…Okay.”

For Yoon Hamin, acquiring strength was now a distant prospect.

With what he already possessed, he could likely protect the world on his own.

The problem at hand was not lacking in strength, but rather restrictions imposed by that strength.

This was something I knew without needing to recover my memories.

Once he retrieves it, Hamin’s concept of strength would certainly not be lacking.

So, if we find that method, quite a few problems would be solved.

“Do you trust me?”

“I do.”

The question I threw at Hamin came back immediately.

Without even a moment of hesitation, I nodded in response.

“Then this time I’ll tell you everything, and you just need to follow what I say.”

“…What is it?”

There was no place for us to be.

If I were abandoned, Hamin would have a place to return to, but it seemed he had no intention of letting that happen, making it only natural for him to act according to me.

“There’s always been one monster that broke the barrier, but if, just like last time, two suddenly appear, then we won’t know when the one that devoured your power will come.”

“Right…?”

“Then we need to lure it out.”

Monsters always broke the barrier to enter.

If you asked if there was a standard for how they broke it, it was merely the distance where the totem could reach.

Otherwise, with the assistance of a monster capable of breaking through barriers with power, you could drill a hole wherever you wanted.

Even if I mentioned two methods, distinguishing between them was impossible, but it was clear that a lot of preparation was necessary to breach the desired location.

So let’s create that desired place.

The preparation could easily be done on our end.

“How?”

What does the monster want?

I reminisced about the stories I’d heard in the association while being questioned, and I dug through my memories.

Initially, it seemed the monster wanted to toy with me or had separate plans, as it captured and released me repeatedly during those two attempts.

Such actions wouldn’t seem strange even if described as entertainment.

However, in the next two encounters, it attempted to k*ll me.

It tried to sow discord and even tried to directly k*ll me, so it must certainly be a bothersome presence now.

If that’s the case, wouldn’t my existence serve as sufficient bait?

Could I not be the kind of existence that the monster would want to go after and k*ll?

“I could leave a totem to indicate this wall is easy to open, and also let it know I’m here. If getting the totem proves difficult, then it would be right to choose the latter.”

“…If you do that, you’ll be in danger.”

“But there’s nothing more certain than this. The monster that devoured your power is likely feeling a bit shaken now that the other monster it came with has died. Maybe it won’t even think of coming unless it’s that monster.”

Though they are referred to as monsters, they are ultimately human.

They have overcome unrefined magical power and live with it.

They are compatible with monsters but are driven away for being too strong and different.

Nevertheless, it remains true they feel fear despite their strength.

Thus, it was essential to inform them that without bringing the monster that devoured Hamin’s power, nothing will be accomplished.

And after hearing my words, Yoon Hamin contemplated for a while.

“…How should we do it?”

I didn’t ask how he knew that.

Yoon Hamin looked at me with a puzzled expression.

He asked for my opinion.

“Let’s get closer to the barrier.”

“What comes next?”

“For now, that’s enough.”

As I told him that, Hamin nodded and lifted me up once more.

His back, while carrying me along with the luggage, was warm.

Ch. 125 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 125

What does it mean to say ‘I’?

At first, it was just enjoyable. I was satisfied just spending each day with Hamin. But that’s not how it is now.

My feelings for Hamin haven’t diminished. It’s just that the way I think is changing little by little.

When Hamin said he would heal me, I accepted it, but after being dragged away, the lost memories awkwardly started to return, making me feel strange.

These memories are clearly mine, yet they are experiences I did not directly go through. Those memories are also somewhat unclear, yet they seem like things I have experienced.

The outline of memories, blurred and indistinct, makes it hard to distinguish between what I remember and what I do not.

In the midst of it all, I had to take time to ponder what I remember and forget. Where do these memories come from, and did I really go through them?

And the result came to me as confusion.

I wished I knew nothing at all; I didn’t understand why half-formed recollections only troubled my mind.

Of course, I knew that this wasn’t created for my own sake. I also knew that they had no interest in how or why I was suffering.

After all, confusion about memories is not physical pain, so it doesn’t show.

Only the confusion of what this memory is and what that memory is, and the sense of disconnection between them is all I could grasp.

“…”

I let out a soft groan. Hamin, sitting next to me, glanced at me.

“Are you okay?”

“…I’m fine, really.”

I was frowning too much, causing Hamin to worry and not know what to do.

We had made it close to the Barrier, and since there was still no warrant issued, we reserved a place to stay nearby. I sat quietly, dazed, in a room with two beds.

Unable to stop worrying about my dazed state, Hamin, who had stopped rummaging through the suitcase, cautiously came closer and sat next to me.

I glanced at Hamin beside me and mumbled. I didn’t even know what to say.

“Should we stop if it’s too hard?”

“No, that’s not it.”

I didn’t need that kind of consideration. Even if I received kindness, in a situation where I didn’t even know if I could escape or not, I would just end up running away aimlessly.

Having come this far, I had to see it through.

If Hamin had chosen to turn his back on everyone and be alone, I wanted to somehow send him back in another way.

The world needs Hamin. That fact hasn't changed. I, and the 'me' within the memories, shared that sentiment.

It was undeniably my fault for making Hamin choose me over becoming the world's hero, but if I could at least make amends for my mistakes like this, wouldn't that be a form of atonement?

After all, this was all selfish hope of mine, so I didn't expect too much.

Even if Hamin regained his place, there was no place for me. If he could reclaim what he lost because of me, that would be fine.

I just hoped that when I felt lonely sometimes, he would think of me. Even if it were after I died, if he remembered me, I felt I could be satisfied with that.

Hamin glanced at me again and cautiously asked.

"…So what should I do now?"

"Just carry me."

I stretched out my hand as if it were that simple.

With my damaged leg, I couldn't even stand on my own, so I had to rely on Hamin. With my finger that had a hole in it, I couldn't pick anything up properly, so I had to leave that to Hamin as well.

Eating, dressing, washing, moving—none of it was something I could do without someone's help. I had become an incompetent fool, but I hoped this could be somehow helpful.

"Where to?"

"Just close to the Barrier? Um, if possible, a little further from where the cracks in the Barrier are."

I skimmed through information confirmed through news articles on the way. It mentioned that heroes were being called to gather near the Barrier now.

Because of this, it seemed the Association thought it wouldn’t be good to start two major operations at once, so they didn’t deal with Hamin’s situation.

Perhaps once the repairs on the Barrier were completed and there was confidence that monsters wouldn’t intrude, they would return to try catching Hamin.

If that were the case, it could be seen that a significant amount of time was indeed given.

They had been bitten by the heroes, but how would they conclude that it was safe to act without knowing if the monsters might rush in? Once the repairs on the Barrier were finished, they would likely only lower the danger level after a certain period.

Then, there was only one thing I could ask Hamin to do.

To ensure that crisis doesn’t end. Instead, to magnify that crisis.

I could delay the time spent chasing Hamin while simultaneously creating an opportunity for him to regain his strength.

Not missing that opportunity was the key to this matter.

If Hamin ran away as he suggested, he would spend his life fleeing without ever having the chance to regain strength.

“…Is that really okay? No, wouldn’t it be dangerous if you did that?”

“Dangerous…?”

I tilted my head.

“Isn’t it inevitable…? After all, we’re trying to provoke the monsters.”

“What if the Barrier collapses while I’m carrying you?”

“…It wouldn’t be possible for them to push in all at once. We don’t have a Totem.”

“That’s true.”

Hamin nodded with a hum.

“Kanna, then starting tomorrow? Or maybe from this evening?”

“Since time is tight, let’s start from this evening.”

“Then should we wash up first?”

Hamin pointed at me as he said that.

Now that I thought about it, we were both looking ragged from rushing around. Hamin and I felt like our hair was a mess.

In my case, there were even bloodstains that hadn’t been cleaned up firmly on parts of my body.

“…I guess we should.”

I responded like that, but then I remembered that it was impossible to stand up or wash with my hands and feet damaged, so I had to smile bitterly as I spoke.

“Um, can you help me?”

“…Oh, okay.”

There was a brief awkward atmosphere, but Hamin nodded without any signs of refusal. Still, it seemed he couldn’t help but feel awkward or shy.

I wondered why my limbs weren’t functioning properly, but for the time being, I was just grateful to be alive and cautiously moved out.

I had to rely on Hamin for washing, drying, and dressing. Hamin stood behind me, seemingly making an effort to avoid looking at my body.

I felt embarrassed for putting my body in someone else’s hands, lowering my flushed face, but it didn’t feel like we were directly facing each other, so it didn’t feel like it was going to burst.

After washing up, once Hamin dried my body and dressed me, he then carried me to the bed.

Lying down on the soft bed, I felt a refreshing sensation from the bed and the soft blankets as I rolled around.

It felt like it had been ages since I had last rested and felt peaceful, melting my heart.

“…Ah, I think I can breathe a little easier now.”

“Are you okay, Kanna?”

As I stretched and moaned, Hamin asked cautiously, perhaps worried about how I felt with my hands and feet damaged, but I felt fine. What I feared more was becoming even more seriously injured.

Hamin’s life, and the collapsing Barrier because of him, and this peace. Frankly speaking, I wished that the people who made me this way would all fall apart.

But if things were to fall apart one by one like that, it was obvious that everyone around Hamin would end up in ruin, so I couldn’t bring myself to utter such a curse filled with malice.

It wasn’t dignified. It wasn’t as if it was nothing to me.

I just wanted to do what I could do now while burying those feelings.

“…I’m fine.”

So I said I was fine. It seemed to be the only answer I could give.

I couldn’t lean my heart here either.

*

In the past, I wore a prosthetic arm and leg, so I worried about an outburst of abilities. Because of that, I remembered being washed, but this time, I couldn’t pick anything up with my hands and couldn’t even stand with my legs, making it feel like I was dying of thirst.

The thought that I had water in front of me but couldn’t drink deepened my thirst.

I had already told Kanna that I liked her. I was waiting for her response, but it felt too soon to hear it.

I conveyed this feeling in hopes of bringing Kanna along and firmly asking her to understand my actions and follow me, but rather, I found myself waiting for Kanna’s reply.

Given the situation, I wanted to hear Kanna’s answer. Nevertheless, wouldn’t I have to regain my memories completely to hear it?

That way, time and time again, my longing and my patience were in a back-and-forth.

Honestly, after my memories returned, if I said to her, ‘I’ve only thought of you as a friend…’, it would likely tear my heart apart. I knew my feelings wouldn’t cool off, and I wouldn’t change my mind about wanting to act for Kanna.

Even after going out, my thoughts were filled with Kanna.

As night deepened and it was time to sleep, my mind also deepened, making it hard to fall asleep.

Kanna, what does she think of me right now? Before this happened, what did she think of me?

Thinking this way, I looked at the ceiling and then heard the sound of Kanna rustling and getting up.

“Ugh…”

Kanna’s small groan echoed, and I heard the sound of her moving around on the bed. I was curious about what she was doing, but I felt like if I suddenly looked over in this situation, she would stop whatever she was doing, so I waited.

As I waited, I heard the sound of a pen clicking and something being written down.

What is she writing? I couldn’t sleep at all, fearing that if I fell asleep, Kanna might disappear somewhere the next day.

Ch. 126 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 126

Kanna wrote something throughout the night.

With her fingertips entirely pierced by nails, it must have been difficult even to hold anything, so how did she manage to write?

It was only natural that there would be pain. Kanna suppressed her groans as much as possible, pushing through the discomfort to write something down.

In the dark space, accompanied by the gentle moonlight filtering in from outside, what could she be writing? What words could she be forming?

I was curious, but at the same time, I was afraid. I was worried that the moment she wrote those words, Kanna might stagger out of this room secretly.

Because of that, I couldn’t sleep.

Time passed, and Kanna stopped writing with her pen. The pen clicked once, and she gently tossed the notebook beside her head.

As I feared, she didn’t wander far away. It was only natural that she couldn’t go far due to her injuries, but I still couldn’t let my guard down just in case.

I waited, and waited for Kanna to fall asleep. And at that moment, I sharpened my focus on Kanna’s breath and approached her.

I quietly leaned in to check the notebook that was positioned to the right of Kanna, who was lying down.

I knew that peeking at her writing was wrong, but in Kanna's condition, I couldn't help myself. I feared that she might write a letter saying not to look for her because she would be far away, wishing for a happy life without me.

I didn't want to see something that resembled a will.

She was someone who would tell me to abandon her whenever. Even if I betrayed her or abandoned her, Kanna would smile and say, "That's enough for me," which sent chills down my spine.

Why go to such lengths? What could I possibly have done to deserve this? There was no reason to go that far.

People inherently only know themselves. Is there anyone who knows someone other than "me"? No, there isn't. Such a thing couldn't exist.

Thus, it was selfish.

Just as one cannot pass their pain onto someone else, it was normal not to feel another person's pain. Empathy is possible, but one cannot replace it. People only truly understand something after experiencing it themselves.

So, if they were to say they would d*e, they would, of course, choose to live if they were to suffer to the extent of thinking d*ath was better.

But Kanna was different. She would instead tell me to throw herself into it.

If, by any chance, it were Kanna, wouldn't she possibly throw herself into such a place for my sake? No, I felt it was not just a possibility but something she would definitely do.

The thought that she might do that once her limbs healed sent a chill down my spine.

So I had to see.

I wished Kanna wouldn’t be in pain, but honestly, when her limbs became free and she went where she wanted, I felt I wouldn’t be able to sleep easily.

That’s why I wanted to know what Kanna was thinking.

“I hope you smile.”

Those words had become nothing short of a curse for me.

I couldn’t understand it back then. I thought it was just something to placate me, but now I realized it was a voice laced with sacrifice. I recalled that she was prepared to throw herself into the abyss so that if I made the wrong choice, she could return.

Her eyes seemed to see the future. Her steps moved a foot ahead.

Beyond that, I felt certain that Kanna herself wouldn’t be there.

With an inexplicable desire to take Kanna to that far-off future, I clutched my pounding heart and gently opened the notebook.

“…ha.”

A small sigh escaped me. Should I say I felt like I lost ten years or that I just felt drained?

Kanna’s handwriting was so crooked that I couldn’t read it. It looked as if a child had grasped a pen in a fist and scribbled.

It seemed she had tried to write something but couldn’t. It was only natural considering how much her fingertips hurt.

I turned the page. I turned the second page. I turned the third page.

In that brief time, it seemed as if the crooked drawings had turned into crooked letters. I felt I could read this.

Monster.

This was all I could recognize, but honestly, it didn’t seem to matter if I only realized this. There were traces of her tirelessly practicing her handwriting.

It looked like she had put in a significant effort just to write the word “monster.” And below that was written.

Hamin.

I bit my lip at the small letters.

With trembling hands, I turned the next page. After doing so once, twice, three times, the letters eventually became readable.

I didn’t know how she learned to write without exerting herself, or if she began to write while suppressing the pain, but her awkward handwriting turned into sentences instead of stopping at words.

[Monsters that consume abilities can only consume one ability at a time. The name is Rendel. The weakness is the stomach.]

That was the only completed sentence. I couldn’t tell whether she had written it to show me or if she had written it while retracing her memories.

Flipping to the back, there was nothing written on the subsequent pages. Seeing that it ended here, it seemed she had indeed engraved it to not forget the information she would tell me tomorrow.

“…What is this?”

What is this?

Muttering softly, my eyes caught a part of the last page where lines had been carelessly drawn. As I traced the marks, relying on the light, I noticed the presence of an alien vertical line amid the crazily drawn horizontal ones.

That presence drew my attention, and I slowly began to read as if interpreting it.

I couldn’t expect good handwriting, but I tried my best to read it. I searched for words that made sense in context, and eventually, I realized what the original sentence was.

[If I d*e, just say that I returned and the hypnosis was lifted.]

Though the letters were crooked, it definitely seemed to be written that way.

It was a glimpse of Kanna’s heart, as if she was urging me to grab onto happiness somehow by selling herself.

But what could be done about that? I hated those who sought to buy happiness at such cost.

Regrettably, I couldn’t grant Kanna’s wish. I would want to give her everything she wanted, but I had no choice but to refuse something like this.

Quietly, to avoid waking Kanna, I placed the notebook back in its original position and returned to my spot. Though I rustled as I sat on the bed, a multitude of thoughts ran through my mind before I finally settled.

She had written down those feelings and erased them with a pen, but that didn’t mean she had folded her heart. I wondered if she had erased it because she couldn’t show it to me.

I felt sorry for having seen it, but because I had seen it in advance, I could gather my thoughts.

I realized that from the moment Kanna’s hands and feet healed, that would be the beginning.

I worried she wouldn’t leave me even a letter before disappearing.

I wanted to tell her over and over.

I wasn’t hoping for a place to return to in this way. Like this society, like what the association desired, I did not want to find peace by relying on someone’s sacrifice.

Of course, the situation was different.

The association demanded sacrifice from Kanna—for their own peace.

And in my case, Kanna willingly chose to sacrifice herself, like a hero. Like a hero who would say her life was not precious if it meant preserving the happiness of others and maintaining a smile.

That was why I could say it was different. Nevertheless, I couldn't accept it.

"Ha."

It was a restless night.

Not yet, not yet was the time. I could rest easy knowing Kanna's hands and feet were pained, but if they healed…

I should want her to heal, but I never dreamed I would come to fear Kanna's healing.

Thus, the only thing I could do was let out a pitiful sigh.

I clutched the blanket.

Kanna, Kanna Aurora. She was beautiful, but more than anything, I knew her heart was the most beautiful. So I could not let that heart be cast aside.

What could I do for her?

Always rushing in heart while having done nothing at the moment. Although I promised to protect her, I had never actually protected her properly.

After saying I would believe in her, nothing amounted to anything, so could I truly offer anything?

Though a wave of self-loathing emerged from that sudden thought, my head turned towards Kanna.

No, it must exist.

Even if I cannot, I must achieve it.

Even if I am incompetent, I must be competent.

Without strength, I would only lose. I would be left alone, devastated, unable to protect even one person I love.

I was afraid. I could faintly sense the fear that someone near me would disappear.

And the words Kanna had said came to mind.

I shivered at the thought that everyone around me, except for me, would d*e.

That included Kanna herself. Would Orca d*e too? Would our homeroom teacher d*e as well? Would Sel, who stood as a mentor, also d*e?

“Kanna.”

I muttered softly.

I knew that there would be no response now, so I held back my words, yet my heart remained unchanged. If the answer was a rejection, it would hurt a little, but it wouldn’t change anything.

I wanted to protect her. But wanting that alone wasn’t enough. If only I could reduce my lifespan, cut it down further, and protect her, how nice would that be?

Hold on for me.

Don’t fall apart.

I’ll try again and again.

I’ll do my best to avoid failing next time.

I hope you smile.

Ch. 127 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 127

My fingertips throbbed.

It was the result of staying up all night trying to write diligently.

Calling it a result seemed too miserable, so should I just say it’s karma?

Indeed, the very act of trying to write with these fingers was the problem.

Still, I had to let it out someday. I felt anxious thinking that time might not be plentiful.

I needed to share all the information I had about the monsters.

If I revealed all the truths right now, it might restrict Yoon Hamin’s actions, so would it be too much to share everything about the beasts?

Would it be okay to reveal the truth after dealing with the monsters that were coming at us? After I killed those beasts, how would they view me if I mentioned that they were, in fact, human?

I was both worried and afraid.

As I tried to speak the truth, the sensation of something blocking my throat made me hesitant.

Morning arrived. I rose to greet the sunlight tapping on my eyelids, and as I fiddled with my bandaged hand, I reached out toward the direction of the notebook.

At this hour, with Hamin still asleep, I rummaged through my things for a moment.

Again, the only readable writings were the information about the monster I had to deal with this time.

Since this was information that could be shared verbally right away, it felt like it didn’t matter too much.

I closed the notebook and put it back away.

I glanced over, and on the opposite bed, I could see Hamin’s eyes opening drowsily.

“…Are you awake?”

“Uh-huh.”

When I asked cautiously, a sleepy voice responded.

Chuckling at the sight, I just sat there blankly on the bed.

I couldn’t prepare anything, nor could I move to wash up first.

No matter what I did, I needed Yoon Hamin.

I wondered if I was bothering him for no reason.

Of course, right now, reclaiming Yoon Hamin’s abilities was the priority.

Thinking about the next steps could wait.

“Ugh, you’re up first?”

“…Ah, yeah. I guess I just went to bed early because I was tired.”

I replied in a nonchalant manner.

Then Yoon Hamin nodded, as if understanding.

Rising and scratching his head, Hamin glanced around with a dazed look before locking his gaze onto me.

His golden eyes briefly captured me.

“Sorry, do you want to wash your face?”

“…No, no! I’m fine. If you’re tired, just rest more. I have something to do.”

Hamin seemed to want to help me to the bathroom.

I immediately waved my hand.

As a result, Hamin’s body fell back onto the bed.

Watching his weakly swaying figure, I picked up the pen I had left on the drawer last night.

“What do you need to do?”

“Just… something like rehabilitation therapy.”

I tried to sound vague so I wouldn’t bother Hamin, but without any real explanation, I just opened my mouth.

How much would I really be able to do with this state of my rehabilitation? Just making it hurt a little less would be considered fortunate.

Clicking the pen around, I held the notebook I had set down earlier in the other hand.

As I tried to write slowly, regaining the touch I had from yesterday, Hamin suddenly opened his eyes wide and sat up.

He then came directly toward me.

“You have to wash your face in the morning.”

“Uh, uh?”

“And your fingers are hurting, so what are you writing? Do it later. After you feel better.”

Hamin said this and gently pulled the pen away from my grasp. Then he took the notebook too.

In an instant, my hands felt empty, leaving nothing behind.

Leaving my flailing hands behind, Hamin wrapped one arm under my neck and the other beneath my legs.

As a result, I was lifted up in a princess carry and weakly taken to the bathroom.

“Eek?”

The suddenness made me let out a blank sound, and before I knew it, I was seated on the edge of the bathtub.

Hamin brought a washbasin from the corner, filled it with water, and then lightly pushed it toward me.

“Okay, close your eyes. I’ll wash your face for you.”

“Uh, uh-huh.”

At his words, I tightly shut my eyes, and Hamin, somewhat awkwardly, began to scrub my face with one hand.

“Ugh.”

“Ah, sorry.”

“Ugh.”

There was a brief moment where I almost couldn’t breathe, but it was all right.

Eventually, Hamin’s fingers slipped between my eyes with a gentle poke.

Thinking that some other kid was picking my eye boogers wasn’t exactly a pleasant thought.

But what could I do if I didn’t like it? I wouldn’t be able to handle it myself.

I had no choice but to leave everything to him.

Just when I thought I was finishing washing my face smoothly, Hamin cautiously pinched my nose.

“Eh?”

Making a honking sound, I was taken aback, and Hamin leaned in slightly, mimicking so I would see.

“Sniff, do it.”

“Am, am I a kid…?”

“Still, dealing with it later will be harder.”

At those words, I was at a loss for what to do, and eventually, I squinted my eyes shut and blew my nose.

Hamin watched me and wore a somewhat soft smile.

It was nice that he was so considerate, but I worried about whether I was bothering him.

After hastily eating breakfast, I was able to lightly dress and step out with Hamin.

While moving, I rode on Hamin’s back, but during moments of rest, my task was to momentarily lower myself and sit down on the floor.

“Since we’ve gotten far from the lodging, I should turn on the device for a bit.”

Hamin said this and took out the device from his pocket.

I was concerned that it might track our location, so wanting to avoid getting caught before any warrants were issued, I praised his meticulousness for turning it on in this distant place on purpose.

Hamin, who plopped down beside me, began tapping around on the device’s screen, as if searching for something.

“What’s there?”

“…Hmm, I have a few messages from Orca. She seems to be at the Academy right now.”

Having been cooped up for so long, it felt like my sense of time had vanished.

Yet I could affirm without a doubt that it was a weekday.

I remembered it was the weekend when Hamin and I were dragged away, but realizing I had been trapped for quite a while since then struck me.

More importantly, Hamin’s words about Orca broke into my thoughts.

“Orca? What did Orca say?”

“She asked where we are and that she wants to help.”

If I could help Hamin, I was all for it.

“Yeah, sounds good.”

“Are you okay…?”

Hamin asked back, seemingly really concerned about me, but my opinion hadn’t changed.

In the end, Hamin repeated his worries and then finally reached out to contact her.

“Hey, Orca. It’s me, Yoon Hamin.”

Since it seemed to be during a break, Orca appeared to receive Hamin’s call.

“Not exactly, the situation isn’t very good right now. Um, um. You might need to turn off the device again. Things aren’t going well at the moment… Yeah, I don’t think we can get to the Academy right now.”

Hearing that made me feel regretful.

It was because of me that we couldn’t go.

But Hamin spoke nonchalantly without letting it show at all.

Although I couldn’t hear what Orca was saying, just from Hamin’s voice, it was apparent he was reporting the situation.

Hamin summarized what he had experienced until now and briefly conveyed our current situation, and soon the call ended.

“…What did she say?”

I cautiously asked Hamin, who took the device away from his ear.

Honestly, I didn’t have high expectations.

However, given that the other party was Orca in a heroine position, it was impossible for me not to feel a sense of anticipation.

And as if in response to that expectation, Hamin opened his mouth.

“She said she’ll come here when I tell her our location.”

“Eh?”

“Oh, I didn’t mention the lodging. I only told her about the Barrier here.”

That was all well and good, but I felt it was odd for Orca, who was usually busy because of her family business and often skipped after-school activities, to come here.

Wasn’t it too far off from how Orca typically lived her life?

What would I have thought about this if I hadn’t lost my memory?

What kind of feelings would it evoke to see all the information I knew becoming scraps of paper due to a single choice?

If I had known it would turn out like this, I really shouldn’t have changed anything from the start.

What I had done before losing my memory was indeed my doing, yet it felt increasingly resentful like it belonged to someone else.

Once I regained my memories, would it lead to me blaming myself?

Or would those feelings remain and I would understand them unknowingly?

I didn’t know. In a moment where I couldn’t prove that I was me, I was simply another person.

Sitting with my back leaned against the Barrier and legs stretched out, I gently placed my hand on my thigh and turned to Hamin.

“Hamin.”

“Yeah?”

“Am I a bother?”

“…No, not at all. Why?”

“I don’t know, I just thought maybe I’m making you do too many things…”

I asked the thought that suddenly came to my mind, but Hamin gazed at me as if wondering why I was asking.

I felt like there was something he wanted to say.

The fierce gaze that seemed to say he would never think of me as a bother pressed down on me.

“Kanna, I have never thought you’re a bother, not even once.”

“…Really?”

“Really.”

“…Is that so?”

Hamin’s earnest and weighty voice left me dazed, and I hesitated to continue speaking.

I thought he might find it annoying to take care of me, but now I felt surprised, or maybe I should say Hamin was incredibly kind.

“I shouldn’t have asked such a pointless question, hehe. Anyway, I was just curious about the monster we need to catch, right?”

To steer the awkward atmosphere back, I brought up the information I hadn’t shared yet.

“The name is Rendel, and he’s the one who has consumed Hamin’s abilities… one at a time…”

As I started eagerly explaining about the monster, Hamin seemed to focus solely on me, as if he didn’t care about the content at all.

His awareness seemed concentrated solely on me.

“…I-I’m sorry, I’ll stop asking questions, so please don’t stare at me like that…?”

“Okay.”

Hamin nodded and slightly loosened his eyes.

That didn’t mean he wasn’t looking at me, so I had to sneak a glance to check his reaction.

Ch. 128 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 128

Various thoughts came to mind, but somehow it seemed that Hamin was the type to dislike such stories.

Wouldn’t I bother him? Wouldn’t he suffer for no reason because of me? Would he want to give up on me at any time and return to a peaceful life?

When such thoughts arose, I wanted to open the opportunity to let him know that it was okay to leave me behind anytime.

Hamin looked at me with his mouth tightly shut, as if he disliked such things.

Unable to resist that gaze, I fell silent and leaned my back against the barrier.

A gentle breeze blew through.

Although the barrier had cracks, we stuck close to it as if we were on a picnic.

I was fine with peace as it was, and I was fine if it wasn’t peaceful. I just enjoyed the moment, regardless of anything.

What was Hamin thinking? If he desperately needed the power he had lost, I would have thought to help him.

If I wanted to help Hamin, I would have to lay everything bare, right? But what kind of result would it bring if I confessed to the kind-hearted Hamin that the monsters were actually humans?

Right now, we needed to fight, and would it be better to let him fight without knowing the truth? What if he looked at me resentfully the moment all the truths were revealed?

Outside the barrier, there is humanity adapted to unrefined magical power.

And humanity, which feared that unknown power, drove them away.

They rejected change. Could it be said that they, fearing to become one of the obsolete humans, labeled them as mutants or monstrosities?

Regardless of whether they could accept it or not, the matter was that I didn’t know what kind of expression I would make when I learned that truth.

To me, it was a truth that approached me like common sense, and since I already possessed memories from before I lost them, I didn’t feel any sense of dissonance.

But Hamin was different. The people inside this barrier were as well.

As I continued to worry, quite some time had passed.

Honestly, even though it was called a strategy, it was all about revealing my existence to the monsters, and since I didn’t know how the monsters were reacting, it became frustrating not knowing the progression.

I planned to repeat this until a reaction came, today, tomorrow, and the day after.

“…It’s past six.”

Hamin looked up after checking his wristwatch.

It was time for dinner, but it also seemed that it was about the time Orca would arrive.

“Hamin.”

“Yeah?”

“…Um, never mind.”

I worried if someone was following from Orca’s side.

I wasn’t sure if Orca would reach out during this chaotic situation, but that was uncertain.

I could accept either way.

Still, if Hamin ended up in a situation like mine in this scenario, I would dislike that.

Even as many thoughts exchanged, time did not wait and flowed mercilessly.

As if to say I had thought too much and worried too much, Orca’s figure came into view.

I had seen her before. She was a beautiful girl with lovely golden hair and blue eyes, who had come to visit Hamin’s house.

“Yoon Hamin! Kanna!”

“Ah, you came quickly? Have you eaten?”

“Ah, no. I came directly through the terminal… I turned off the device as soon as I got off. Is this how it’s supposed to be?”

“I just said that because I was anxious. I don’t think anything will happen right away, but it doesn’t hurt to be careful.”

As Hamin said that, he glanced around.

He seemed to be trying to see who might be following behind Orca as she came closer to me, leaning against the barrier.

Orca, seemingly uninterested in such things, approached me.

“Kanna! Why are you sitting like this? You’ll get your clothes dirty…!”

Seeing me sitting on the ground in short sleeves and shorts, she rushed over in shock.

“Wait, why are your hands like this again? Kanna, are you hurt a lot?”

“Ah… I’m fine.”

Surprised by the fact that my hands and feet were damaged during the brief period I hadn’t seen her over the weekend, Orca worried about me.

There would be no good in telling such a kind-hearted person the truth.

And although I certainly wanted to be friends with her, I couldn’t allow that.

After all, it was because Hamin had become close to me and given his heart to me that I ended up like this.

I didn’t want to repeat the same mistakes again.

Once was enough for mistakes.

I held my hands together, keeping some distance despite Orca’s worries.

After clasping them, I carefully adjusted the wrappings.

Since both hands were covered in bandages, I didn’t feel any particular sensation.

As I hesitated, Orca looked at me as if she were somewhat upset.

Her wide-open eyes looked sad, but they didn’t seem to reproach me.

And that gaze soon turned towards where Hamin was.

“Why did Kanna become like this…? No, wasn’t she staying at Yoon Hamin’s house?”

Though she spoke quietly, seeming to suggest I shouldn’t listen, it was mostly quiet in this area due to the heroes being dispatched to the cracked zones, so I heard everything.

Yoon Hamin scratched his head in confusion, then let out a deep sigh.

“…I’m sorry, the Association sent someone over and it couldn’t be helped.”

Hamin said that and briefly glanced at me.

“Kanna.”

“Yeah?”

“I’m going to talk with Orca for a bit. I won’t go far, I’ll be talking in a place you can see. Just rest here for a moment.”

“Uh, uh-huh.”

I nodded.

What kind of conversation was it that I wasn’t allowed to hear?

But as Hamin didn’t disappear from my sight, I felt reassured.

I didn’t feel abandoned or anything like that.

…Ah, what am I hoping for?

I think I’d rather not care even if I were abandoned, so why do I keep having such thoughts?

Am I secretly wanting to not be abandoned or something like that?

It can’t be helped. In truth, I want to live peacefully and desire happiness.

But knowing that it can’t be, because if I’m here, Hamin, and this world would be ruined, I couldn’t allow it.

I do not choose emotionally.

I have to think rationally.

No matter how foolish it may seem, if it’s for Hamin’s happiness, I would ultimately have to make the same choice, regardless of what ‘I’ it was.

Nothing will change.

It wouldn’t be a matter of suddenly changing my mind at the end, or of not clinging to Hamin because I didn’t want to d*e.

As long as I don’t do something like suddenly wanting to live and take what Hamin deserves, everything would be fine.

It’s simple.

Abandoning myself.

Saving Hamin.

“Um.”

Hamin and Orca were speaking quietly, discussing something.

But neither of their faces looked happy at all.

That was not the kind of sight I wanted to see, and I felt a bit disappointed.

*

I worried about whether Kanna might feel isolated, but this was a story I couldn’t share with her, so we had no choice but to be apart.

Even so, not seeing her added to my anxiety, so talking quietly while remaining in view was all I could do.

It was time to explain to Orca, who seemed like she wanted to question how Kanna ended up like that despite being with me.

“…So why did Kanna end up like that?”

The atmosphere dipped a bit with the words about the Association sending people.

Since I mentioned before that there were interventions when Kanna got prosthetic arms or legs, Orca couldn’t help but be concerned.

Perhaps she was the closest person to the Association among the students of the Academy.

I sighed in front of her and then passed the answer back.

“It seems the Association is trying to completely exclude Kanna now. There may be some trauma at this moment, so I couldn’t ask for details. But once the current situation settles, they’ll probably send someone again. Just in case, let’s turn off the devices for now.”

“…Exclude, you say?”

“You saw before. No matter how hard Kanna fights the monsters, if they determine that there’s a risk to the barrier, they seem to think it’s better to eliminate her.”

It sounded like something I’d heard somewhere.

The trolley dilemma.

If one doesn’t act, people d*e.

But by acting, lives can be saved.

The downside is that someone who wouldn’t have died because of the act may end up dying instead, but if it’s Kanna, just one life, the Association seems willing to endure that.

“That can’t be.”

“Anyway, I need to ask Kanna for more details, but the truth is we have only just come out, and we don’t have much information yet.”

I spoke honestly. However, that wasn’t the reason I had distanced myself from Kanna.

What was important was this part.

“Kanna seems a bit uncomfortable around you…”

“I was complimented for being pretty before; it’s a little disappointing.”

As I trailed off, Orca nodded and quickly filled in my trailing words. She expressed what she wanted to say first, and then I just followed up.

“Right. But right now, she probably doesn’t want to get close to anyone.”

“…Huh? Why?”

“Kanna keeps saying it’s okay for her to abandon herself, even to me.”

Kanna’s bright face when she looked at Orca with delight, calling her pretty.

And the dark demeanor she demonstrated here, feeling uncomfortable around Orca.

Between those two feelings lay her inherent nature.

Everywhere, there was a sense of the psychology that said, “After all, I’m someone who will d*e.”

“…It seems Kanna wishes for me to abandon her.”

I repeatedly conveyed the current situation to Orca.

Ch. 129 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 129

Orca opened her eyes wide upon hearing those words.

“What? You think Kanna wants you to abandon her…?”

Seeing Orca repeat the incomprehensible words, it seemed she too found it utterly confusing. Before I could string together a response, Orca directed her wavering gaze towards the place where Kanna was.

Her hands, and the slip-on sandals that Kanna was wearing as she couldn’t completely go without, were wrapped tightly in bandages.

Orca didn’t know. What was hidden beneath those bandages.

It was better not to know. There was nothing good about knowing the wounds concealed by those bandages.

Nevertheless, Orca’s expression was not good.

She might have recalled the moments when Kanna’s hands were wrapped in bandages countless times.

She might have remembered the moment when Kanna collapsed on the floor from the aftereffects of a traffic accident.

She might have recalled the moment when, in front of everyone, she overly used her ability and revealed her prosthetic arm.

Because of that, she could vaguely guess. Even if she didn’t know how severe the injuries were, she could realize that they were by no means

minor.

Orca’s expression crumpled.

“Why…?”

“I guess it’s painful to see me unable to go to the Academy like this. I think she believes it’s all her fault.”

In response to Orca’s question, I quietly recalled Kanna’s voice.

“…When I was taken away, I said something out of fear that something might go wrong. Do you know what I said?”

Orca asked in silence. Her gaze urged me to continue, and I complied.

“She said she was controlling me, and that I had no choice but to follow, but if I was innocent, I could go with her anytime.”

Remembering that made my throat hurt. I felt emotions rising up inside me.

“It’s hard to put into words… She said that since she’s an electrical user, she controlled my heartbeat to make me like her. That’s why I followed her. Is that even logical?”

I poured out words I couldn’t say to anyone. It felt as if the emotions that had been tangled up inside me were being expelled.

It seemed like tears would spill out at any moment.

“…And, and… it’s just driving me crazy.”

I washed my face with cold water. Even though it didn’t clear my mind, I could at least control my emotions for a while.

In truth, all I could talk about was what I did over the weekend, what Kanna went through, and what she was thinking and doing, but when I actually tried to say it, my throat felt choked.

“Yoon Hamin…”

Orca patiently waited for me. She gave me time, time to collect my thoughts.

“Sigh, in the end, she even pretended to be a monster because I was truly in danger. I can’t fathom what kind of feelings she had to go that far without even regaining all her memories.”

As I recounted those events, Orca wet her parched lips and took a deep breath.

“It seems that Kanna likes you.”

“…What do you mean by that?”

“I mean, it’s obvious when you look at her. Before all this, she leaned on you well, and now, when she feels you might be in danger, she immediately pushes you away. If that isn’t because she likes you, what is?”

Kanna likes me? If that were true, there would be nothing more joyful than that. But if the outcome resulted in this, I didn’t want it.

It was unacceptable that she would sacrifice herself for me because she liked me.

“…Kanna can’t even pick things up with her hands. Right now, she can’t even stand on her feet, that’s why she’s just sitting there. She ended up like this because she got dragged to the Association. You think she would go back to that hell for me? Next time, it won’t just be hands and feet that will be at stake?”

Orca’s eyes widened in disbelief at how serious the matter was.

“I would never abandon Kanna just to survive myself. But I don’t think Kanna will change her mind, so can you try persuading her, Orca?”

“What? Me?”

I recalled those uneven lines I had scribbled in a notebook, telling myself not to read them aloud.

Kanna making an extreme choice, her wanting to return on her own, waiting for me to abandon her—all of those outcomes must not happen.

“I don’t usually say this, but no matter how much I talk, Kanna doesn’t listen. Still, I thought you might understand her a little since you’re both girls. You’re friends too.”

Anyone would do. As long as Kanna could change her mind.

I was that desperate, but it seemed Orca didn’t think so.

“If what you’re saying is true, Kanna won’t accept me as a friend right now. Conversations won’t go well.”

“Why? No, you called her a friend before.”

“Not anymore. And I don’t think she would want someone to keep getting in the way of her sacrifices. Like Yoon Hamin, for instance.”

Unconsciously, I looked at where Kanna was.

Orca continued speaking towards me.

“You’ve become unable to act as a student of the academy or as a prospective hero because you’re siding with Kanna in this situation. After all, the choice you made while abandoning everything was Kanna.”

“That’s true.”

“Seeing that from the side, Kanna hated it. To her, those things seemed more valuable than herself, and she couldn’t understand Yoon Hamin’s willingness to give them up.”

I bit my lip.

“How could it be like that…”

“It wasn’t about choosing between people and status. It was about choosing between Kanna herself or Yoon Hamin.”

“I know. But there’s nothing more important than oneself, right?”

“And that’s why I said Kanna seems to like you.”

The conversation had once again returned to square one.

No, it wasn’t square one. I could see Kanna from Orca’s perspective.

But the idea that Kanna liked me was both joyful yet uncertain, leaving me feeling ambiguous as to whether I was simply jumping to conclusions.

In the end, it was all a situation brought forth by everyone thinking of each other, yet if that’s the case, I couldn’t allow this feeling to be compromised. In this situation, Kanna must not be allowed to win.

Kanna had low self-esteem when she attended the academy.

But what would Kanna have been like before attending the academy?

I didn’t think she would think that Yoon Hamin’s life was more important than hers. Then, perhaps, as Orca said, were her feelings a bit more involved?

“…Then you can’t persuade Kanna, Orca.”

“Yes, it seems like it’s an issue you need to resolve directly.”

“What should I do then…?”

“First, should we set a time to contact each other? It’s not like I can come out like this all the time.”

“I’m sorry, but could you let me know what kind of help you can provide?”

The first one to reach out was Orca. She came here to learn about my condition, and I called her with a sense of desperation.

But if she wasn't going to help change Kanna's heart, I needed to confirm if there was still help she could offer.

At this very moment, what would save us were solutions and tangible resources, not emotions like friendship or love.

After a moment of contemplation, Orca sharply shot her blue eyes at me.

"I can manage to procure weapons. Would that be needed?"

"…It's necessary."

"Then next time, I'll leave them somewhere and send you a text when I have time, and you can go find the weapons at the designated location when you get my message."

"Thank you."

"I have to do at least this much. Kanna and you are both fighting hard."

Orca replied that way and gave a small wave of her hand. I nodded at that gesture and turned my steps toward where Kanna was.

*

Kanna was willing to sacrifice herself for Yoon Hamin.

Despite being dragged to the Association and losing the use of her hands and feet, she was trying to return to that hellish place once again.

When it could have been worse than the time she had prosthetic arms and legs, she was willingly stepping forward even though she could have just been discarded after losing her limbs.

At first glance, it was an incomprehensible sight, but there was nothing incomprehensible if one checked what could be gained from doing so.

Returning to Yoon Hamin’s daily life.

She was trying to sacrifice everything for Yoon Hamin, who would struggle with employment or even just living before becoming a hero.

The fact that Kanna prioritized Yoon Hamin above herself ultimately meant just one thing: Kanna liked Yoon Hamin. That fact made it possible to understand this entire situation.

“Kanna.”

I approached Kanna and called out cautiously. Her violet eyes flicked toward me briefly.

I smiled bitterly at that look and spoke.

“Do you like Yoon Hamin?”

“…I suppose he’s okay.”

That evasive answer made me nod involuntarily.

It seemed possible that she was dodging the question out of embarrassment.

“What would you think if Yoon Hamin were to d*e for you?”

“Eh? Why suddenly…”

It was sudden. I had come to persuade her to Yoon Hamin’s liking right after hearing from him.

At times like this, I wanted to convey to Kanna how Yoon Hamin felt from his perspective.

I wanted to tell her that if she thought about Yoon Hamin, wouldn’t it be better not to think that way?

Yoon Hamin was following closely behind, but Kanna’s gaze trembled.

“No, no… If Hamin dies… I, I will d*e…”

“No, that’s not it! I didn’t mean to say Yoon Hamin would d*e… I just asked what you would think if such a thing were to happen. I’m sorry. I think I asked something unnecessary.”

It felt like it would be better not to say any more, even considering perspectives.

In the face of Kanna’s reaction, which could be described as pathological, I took a deep breath, glancing back at Yoon Hamin who was following behind. He seemed to have heard what I said earlier and let out a complicated breath while casting me a brief glance.

I understood why Yoon Hamin couldn’t persuade her and had asked me instead. It was clear that in such a situation, no one could persuade her.

Ch. 130 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 130

Due to Yoon Hamin’s request, I tried to persuade Kanna just once, but the road was expected to be treacherous. Still, I wondered if giving up after just one attempt would seem insincere, so I stealthily approached her for another try.

Kanna, sitting with her legs stretched and using the barrier as a backrest, averted her gaze as if anxious.

She had the expression of a tense person. Seeing her tongue slightly moisten her dry lips before swallowing, I thought it best not to say anything too provocative.

“Then why are you going to such lengths? Is it because you like Yoon Hamin?”

I engaged her in conversation without forgetting to smile.

If it was because she liked Yoon Hamin, then I wanted to say that Yoon Hamin liked her too, and I tried to find some common ground.

Honestly, if I could get this far, it would solve Yoon Hamin’s worries and resolve Kanna’s situation, making it a win-win situation.

Kanna stared blankly for a moment before opening her mouth.

“…If Hamin dies, the world will perish. Everyone will d*e.”

“Is that so, you believe Yoon Hamin will… excuse me?”

I had rehearsed my response in advance, but what I heard was entirely different from what I had anticipated.

Liking someone to the extent of wanting to d*e in their place. Something like me doesn’t matter. Their life is more precious. I thought she acted and spoke in a way that conveyed she wanted to protect the other person’s life by sacrificing herself, not wanting to obstruct their future.

However, Kanna’s words were beyond that imagination.

“Perish…?”

Kanna fidgeted with her hands. Shifting her trembling gaze around nervously, she ultimately fixated on what seemed to be her mental pillar.

At the end of that gaze stood Yoon Hamin, standing blankly.

Seeing her look at Yoon Hamin without any particular surprise made me conclude that Kanna had told Yoon Hamin the same story before.

It didn’t feel right to dismiss it as a lie; this anxiety felt far too genuine. Yet saying it was true seemed absurd, leaving me confused about which side to choose.

“Why does Miss Kanna think the world will perish? The Lamiris family is protecting this barrier. Of course, it has been breaking down constantly lately, but our goal is to build a barrier that won’t collapse in the future.”

Thus, I spoke to alleviate her anxiety.

Simply standing there absent-mindedly and saying it will be like that wouldn’t work. Therefore, as the family heir and eldest daughter of the Lamiris family, I thought it might be comforting to say something.

However, Kanna just gazed at me silently. She seemed to be saying not to speak such nonsense.

While I knew Kanna wasn’t that kind of person, it was clear she thought what I was saying was absurd.

“I may not be the head yet… but Miss Kanna, I don’t understand what you are so afraid of. I want to understand. I want to be of help to you, even a little.”

Feeling frustrated by her seemingly ignoring me despite her close presence made me feel teary.

It felt like she was seeing something different from me, leading to that sense of helplessness.

“…I’m sorry. If I had believed in you from the start, would things have been a bit different? Would you have relied on me?”

But there was nothing I could do. I hadn’t believed in Kanna from the beginning.

I was simply passing by, thinking that Yoon Hamin would protect her, and there was no time for any more.

Even if I had decided to change my mind halfway through, the image she had shown from the start couldn’t be changed. Hence, I felt sorry and regretful.

The reality is that those words, “I didn’t know back then,” cannot turn back time.

Kanna didn’t know the memories of the Academy. She only said I was pretty and glad to see me based on my appearance. I had talked about learning magic suddenly, but we hadn’t met afterward, so there was no familiarity.

Yet, suddenly holding Kanna and discussing these things made me feel she wouldn’t be able to like me even if she tried.

It was merely a complaint that only I understood, a regret known only to me.

“…Barrier.”

As I held that bitter feeling while bowing my head, Kanna’s muttering voice slipped out.

I looked up, trying to concentrate on what Kanna was about to say.

“The barrier can’t be trusted.”

Kanna’s voice held no trust. Others were investing madly into this endeavor, insisting that it had to work. The moment that investment stopped, and support was cut off, humanity’s survival, let alone whether they’d be alive tomorrow, was uncertain, leading people to pray to escape that fear.

Those who wished to live, who wanted to live today and tomorrow, didn’t always feel grateful, but they spent each day reassured by the barrier, finishing each day relieved.

Yet there was a girl here who held neither faith nor hope. Her eyes seemed to observe a world different from ours, which couldn’t be overlooked.

Along with me, classmates, and even teachers, had dismissed her as hopeless, thinking she would naturally fend for herself once she got a job.

The adults in the association, realizing they couldn’t go beyond the barrier, feared the outside immensely. Even if they went out, construction would be impossible; they’d surely d*e helplessly, so they wanted to protect at least this barrier and tried to exclude Kanna.

Thus, it was only for me, wanting to remain friends, that I could hear her voice. Only Yoon Hamin, who had remained as a friend, was told that information.

“Can I ask why?”

What had she seen?

“Is there a reason Miss Kanna can’t trust the barrier? Is it because it collapses too often…? If that’s the case, I can’t blame you. We’ve been researching for decades, yet it ultimately broke through.”

I analyzed the current situation to some extent and expressed it in a lawyer-like manner to lessen her worries, but Kanna lifted her head blankly, as if to indicate that wasn't the point.

Looking up at the barrier she was leaning against, Kanna opened her mouth vacantly.

"…There are many means to destroy a wall. There are totems, but now there will also be monsters. Since I've started bringing companions, the monsters that break the walls will have joined forces too."

Her voice carried a certainty that no one knew or could guess with assurance.

And dismissing everything, her voice answered with conviction, as if she could see through everything.

"Now, even without totems, the barrier can be broken if someone decides to. Of course, it needs to be fed, but for now."

Kanna was fearful. It was not something empty or nonsensical.

No, it seemed that only Kanna understood how it looked absurd.

"I can't do anything. If I don't want to d*e, I have no choice but to run from the crumbling wall. Crumbling, over and over until losing even the place to escape, is the predetermined future of extermination."

It was a voice that felt like it had been heard before.

"Except for one person."

And then her gaze fixed on one point. I unwittingly followed that gaze, and Yoon Hamin, who received two gazes at once, turned his head in surprise.

Wondering if someone was behind him due to the gaze directed at him, he turned but found no one, and his expression turned dazed.

"…Me?"

Kanna wore a sad expression.

She was giving an answer as to why she was going through this.

Both Hamin and I continually urged her to stop sacrificing herself, so perhaps she was feeling frustrated, clutching onto the memories she hadn’t lost while continuing to speak.

The heart that thought of Yoon Hamin even in this state was not just a simple story of liking him.

Just a moment ago, I thought Yoon Hamin liked Kanna, and Kanna liked Yoon Hamin too. Perhaps Yoon Hamin felt that way, but Kanna was different.

Kanna wasn’t volunteering for sacrifice with such simple feelings.

She was looking farther into the future than anyone else and actively moving for that future.

Her mindset, wanting to save humanity and even the people who had tormented her, felt dazzling.

“Kanna…”

Kanna remained silent, swallowing the words she seemed about to say.

Yoon Hamin hesitated for a moment but then let out a small groan.

“…….”

Yoon Hamin, who didn’t say anything. And Kanna, who had spoken such shocking words.

I wished it were a lie; I wished it were a joke.

That serious expression shattered my hopes.

Was Yoon Hamin left alone because she thought she had to be by his side? Was she holding on to him because she believed he was the only way to save the world?

Did she think that when it was time for Yoon Hamin to d*e, she had to be the one who could offer her life without any hesitation by his side?

After all, who would believe her if she went to others and said, “Yoon Hamin is the only way to save the world. So please, with your lives, save Yoon Hamin”?

Since no one would believe her, that was the method Kanna chose. The actions of Kanna before losing her memory were being carried on by Kanna after losing her memory.

Not knowing what had happened at the Academy, Kanna, who had smiled so innocently before, now wore a sad expression once again.

Ch. 131 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 131

Orca talked to Hamin for a while before heading back urgently. It was well-known that she had little time due to the responsibilities of the Lamiris family.

“Orca said she would give me a weapon later. If she hides it in a place where people don’t know and sends me a message, it will feel like I’m going to retrieve it.”

“Uh-huh.”

I nodded.

It was originally the right timing to speak up, but I felt a bit guilty, as if Orca had come to say something. It just seemed like the timing was off.

Would Hamin understand, though?

He didn’t seem to be in a bad mood right now, but if I suddenly brought it up and said I was upset, how would he respond?

“Speaking of which, Kanna.”

“Um, huh? Yes, why?”

I was startled by the serious tone and turned to look at Yoon Hamin.

In fact, I had previously said that Yoon Hamin would be the only one to survive. I had said it before, and it wasn’t that long ago—I’d said it just yesterday when I was hastily leaving for the terminal.

So when Orca came and said something this time, I thought the difference was just in the details, and there was no reason to be scolded. Still, I couldn’t help but feel a bit intimidated.

But Hamin smiled, as if to say I didn’t need to worry about those concerns.

“Don’t worry.”

“Uh…?”

“I won’t put you in a situation where you have to d*e in my place.”

“Ah, okay…”

I nodded.

I recalled what Orca had said. What would I do if Hamin risked his life instead of me? What would I feel? At that moment, I felt panicked as everything ahead turned dark.

Yoon Hamin, who was observing next to me, seemed to have concluded that he would create a situation where I would not need to sacrifice myself.

I was happy. If I could work hard and save the world, that would be enough for me.

Then he would smile. The world would become peaceful, and the hero Yoon Hamin, standing tall as a hero, would smile as he looked at the people and the world he had saved.

Both the me before I lost my memory and the me now wished for the same thing: that moment when Yoon Hamin smiles.

Of course, it wasn’t that I wasn’t smiling now. I just wanted to see him smile until the very end.

“Kanna, by the way, do you think staying like this all day will have any effect?”

“What do you mean?”

“I wonder if just sitting here silently without any sign of anything would lead to any result…”

Hamin seemed concerned.

It was a strategy I had suggested to overcome this situation, but it was understandable to be afraid of whether it would actually work. I wondered if there could be a more daunting strategy than one without visible progress.

Still, it seemed more hopeful than a life of aimlessly escaping.

Anyway, the moment this chaos settled down, it was clear that Hamin and I would be dragged back there again. It was obvious that heroes would come out to catch us at that time.

So, it would be a matter of enhancing the chaos, using that chaos to help Hamin regain his abilities and resolve the situation.

I had no way of knowing what the monster was thinking when it touched the barrier.

The monster Reika had a bad temper. She was one who had learned revenge from the records of her predecessors. While I understood her immediate anger towards her current predicament, she was merely projecting her grievances, wanting to express her unfairness by comparing it to the pain of her predecessors.

Her desire for revenge or hatred stemming from the suffering she endured, rather than that of her predecessors, had the potential to twist a person.

She loved intense emotions. She liked being in the swamp of pain, crying out in agony and suffering from sadness. That was the revenge she had learned.

Next to such a monster was Habar.

I couldn’t say this out loud, but once companions were formed, the absence of the totem meant the wall could crumble at any time.

Habar, a monster with great power, needed a lot of prey to break the barrier, but if he could satisfy his hunger and overcome his laziness, one could argue that no stronger existence could exist.

It was also one of the reasons humanity went extinct in the end.

It’s okay. As long as Hamin is here. I just need to deal with someone named Rendel first.

“It’s okay. For now, all I need to do is let everyone know that I’m here.”

“Really?”

“Uh-huh.”

When I said that, Hamin nodded as if he understood.

I glanced at Hamin, who was sitting quietly on the bed.

“Hey, Hamin.”

“Yes?”

“The notebook you took this morning…”

“Oh, right.”

Hamin said that and took the notebook from a drawer near him.

He seemed to ponder it for a moment, but instead of opening it, he handed it back, which eased my mind.

“What did you write?”

Hamin asked indirectly. He didn’t seem particularly curious, so I casually responded.

“Just things that come to mind. Like my memories before I lost my memory…”

“Oh, do you remember anything?”

“I do, but it doesn’t seem like my memory.”

“Still seems like some of it has returned?”

Yoon Hamin stared at me intently.

When I tilted my head, wondering what he meant, Hamin pointed at me.

“It seems that your memory is at least somewhat integrating. Plus, your speech seems to have changed a bit.”

“…Really?”

“Well, I’m sorry. Something like that could happen after going through what you did… Is it too sensitive?”

Hamin said that and apologized, as if he was concerned about touching on someone else’s wounds.

What did I do or say before that made him act like this?

Washing, eating, sleeping with Hamin… it seemed like normal behavior.

I had never really felt a sense of discomfort in my usual life. Perhaps it was something that didn’t allow for a moment to feel it.

It felt weirder to sleep without Hamin or to use a separate bed like this. But sometimes, when I was frightened by the darkness and opened my eyes, the fact that Hamin was right there in the bed next to me reassured me.

“I’m okay.”

And so, I smiled.

Just having Hamin next to me gives me reassurance and calm; should I even question that?

“Then that’s good… By the way, will we have to do the same thing tomorrow?”

“Probably?”

“This really feels overwhelming.”

Hamin gave a hollow laugh.

“Comparing it to living a life of running away for the rest of my life, this is nothing.”

“…That’s true. Anyway, it’s still within the barrier.”

He scratched his head and smiled at me.

If we just escape without making any progress, we can achieve nothing. So at this moment, I planned to create chaos and obtain what I hoped to achieve through it.

“Rendel, his weak point is his stomach. Make sure to remember that.”

“I know. I remember the face of the guy who drained my abilities at the end.”

“It’s going to be tough since he absorbed my abilities, but will you be alright?”

“I’ll be fine. …Even if I don’t remember, you asked me to be like a star to you before you lost your memory, so because of that, I can unleash stronger power with less strength.”

I looked at Hamin in surprise.

It was a power that would be convenient to use later if mastered quickly. It was also a way to become a significant force when fighting desperately.

I hadn’t imagined I would grasp it this quickly just from hearing those words, and my eyes widened.

Though it was something I had said in a moment of amnesia, it was definitely a method that could be used at the last moment, and it was a statement meant to help save Orca. Hearing how fast the current pace was made it impossible not to think, “Already?”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I did the same when I was rescuing you from the Association.”

Ah, right. Hamin had said he liked me.

I kept forgetting that Hamin’s interest, which was originally directed toward Orca, was now focused on me.

If that’s the case, I had a thought, but still, why me of all people? Wait, being so close might inevitably lead to such thoughts, right? Was I too distracted to feel those emotions?

Only questions remained.

Yet, there were many things to do rather than resolving those doubts.

The weapon Hamin requested would be prepared by Orca. For a while, the money for living would also come from Hamin’s wallet, and I kept thinking about what I could do in return.

Was there something I could do to specially help Hamin? Now that I was in such a condition, relying on him even for trivial tasks, was there anything I could give back?

I stared blankly at my bandaged hands. I looked at the notebook I had placed beside me, but it seemed inadequate for anything like that.

Thinking about just sacrificing myself in a crisis to save Hamin didn’t sit well with him at all. He had given me several signals not to do that.

That he even involved Orca in saying such things meant something.

In the end, all I could offer was information, but it was no exaggeration to say that I hardly had any more information to give.

Regarding the new monster—I was shouting about it even before I lost my memory. There was plenty of information.

I was also discussing things about monsters. It was just that I wasn’t stating that they were also humans like us, just living different lives with different mindsets.

Now, I truly had nothing left to offer. The only role I could play was to be bait so that Hamin could regain his abilities.

From the morning, helping with washing up and going to the bathroom, returning to bed, eating meals, and even carrying me around for outings had been my job. In the evening, returning to eat again, wash up, and go back to bed was all that I did.

I needed Hamin for everything, and Hamin reached out his hand without a word.

“Hamin.”

“Yes?”

What could I do for him?

“…Is there anything I can do?”

Since I couldn’t find the answer myself, I had no choice but to ask.

Ch. 132 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 132

“…Is there anything I can do for you?”

When I heard that voice from Kanna, my eyes widened.

What could I possibly do for her? I already felt like I had received enough, and it made me wonder why she would want to give me anything more.

This was enough. I didn’t want anything more.

I tried to say that, but I realized too late that my heart didn’t feel the same way.

The things I desired were so naturally part of everyday life that, under normal circumstances, I might have thought this was good enough and I didn’t particularly want to be greedy.

Of course, when the time came, there would be a desire to take one more step forward.

And that hadn’t changed even now.

If she had hands and feet, if she had the energy, Kanna would have held onto the desire to fight.

But right now, when her hands and feet weren’t functioning properly, just providing information verbally was sufficient.

Having come this far, I wouldn’t entertain the idea of doubting that information.

Kanna’s information was valuable enough, and I would eventually realize it was right, even if I didn’t grasp it at the moment.

“…Hmm.”

I let out a small sigh.

As for things I wanted, Kanna had already given me all she could, and I wondered if expressing a wish might be my greed.

But if there was still a desire, if it was okay to express it to Kanna.

“I just want you to stay by my side.”

Kanna tilted her head.

It seemed that when I asked what she could do, she was taken aback by my answer.

Still, this was all I wanted.

To ensure Kanna was safe, knowing she might disappear at any moment.

And being next to me so that I could verify that was what I truly wished for.

“I don’t know.”

Kanna murmured, opening her mouth.

It felt like my heart was tightening.

“…Honestly, I can’t be sure.”

“That’s true.”

I could tell just by hearing her voice.

Kanna wasn’t even certain she would be alive in the future.

Despite living such a life, her expression was so calm that it made me emotional.

After her weary reply, a moment of silence followed.

Kanna gathered her bandaged hands and caressed them. The quiet sound of friction tickled my ears.

“Hamin.”

Whether she knew my feelings or not, Kanna continued speaking before I could gather my thoughts.

“I was worried that if I kept talking, you wouldn’t be able to fight, so I held back, but when the time came to speak, you might get mad at me for not saying anything.”

“Why would I get mad? I won’t be angry with you.”

“……”

Even after I said that, Kanna simply stared at me with a blank expression.

The atmosphere seemed like it was about to turn bleak again.

“I’m serious.”

“…Okay, I believe you.”

Kanna said that and lowered her head.

Then she patted the space next to her.

“Sit here.”

“Uh, okay.”

I sat down next to Kanna.

As I perched on the edge of the bed and leaned slightly against her, she glanced at my knee and then withdrew her gaze.

And then.

“Just keep it to yourself.”

“Okay.”

Kanna began to tell a long story.

*

Humanity had a barrier.

This was to protect themselves from the grotesque flow of magical power that sought to devour people and turned animals into monsters.

It had already been hundreds of years, yet during that time, people never gained the confidence that they could live outside the barrier even once.

Numerous studies, attempts, and deaths had been required to reach the next stage.

What exactly made up magical power, and what was the reason it spread?

What could be done with this magical power, and could people fully repel it?

It was no different from saying that the oxygen they breathed from the air would be replaced with carbon dioxide the next day. In such circumstances, people continued to ponder whether they could purify the magical power.

Though attempts were made to leave the barrier by using barrier-blocking clothing, it didn’t last long, and they eventually gave up, believing that one could not confront monsters while wearing it.

Humanity ultimately concluded that leaving the barrier would only result in countless deaths, and they decided to focus on sustaining life within the given area.

Research continued on paper, but time flowed under the assumption that it wouldn’t be practically used.

Two hundred years ago.

At one point, a person was spotted entering and exiting through a crack in the barrier.

A man with black hair and red eyes.

In a shabby area near the barrier, resembling a slum, he had gone out searching for food and discovered the gap in the barrier.

In a time when there was no money and it was difficult to survive day by day, it was the first discovery of a “strange person” who acted out of a need to gather fruits from the forest.

If such a person were discovered now, we might say it was a breakthrough for the development of humanity.

It would be the moment to declare that humans are evolving in real-time.

But this was an event from two centuries ago.

Humanity was afraid of him.

To those who had evolved but not, he seemed alien.

Because he had evolved, he was merely an object of envy for those who had not.

Jealousy, envy, and fear of the unknown intertwined.

Ultimately, after several confirmations, he was determined to be a person adapted to unrefined magical power and was promptly expelled from the

barrier.

At the time, humanity hoped that they could leave as humans.

They were reluctant for such an alien being to enter the outside world and seize new power.

Outside the barrier lay countless resources, and if such beings existed in numbers and united to threaten the people inside, there would be no greater trouble.

Humanity buried their fears.

For the sake of peace and order, they expelled one human.

An alien being. He soon became the first monster.

And just to be cautious, they searched for others with black hair and red eyes, experimenting on them and promptly expelling them from the barrier once they confirmed they possessed the same traits.

Humans were turned into monsters and cast out, and those who became monsters harbored hatred for those who had expelled them, seeking to break the wall.

Monsters filled with hatred began to gather outside the barrier, forming groups and families, learning to endure amongst themselves.

The knowledge that arose and the limits of their transmission made them appear even more monstrous to humanity.

And now, humanity had learned fear.

They had always been monsters, stronger than humans, and warned to be cautious of those that controlled monsters.

And now, monsters had learned hatred.

Not for themselves, but for the humans who expelled their ancestors, fueling their hatred.

Human evolution, intertwined with political movements and the issues raised by people’s fears.

Monsters may currently k*ll without reservation, even finding joy in it; however, their roots were undoubtedly human.

The same human was engaged in battle over whether they had evolved or failed to evolve.

With a barrier sitting between them.

*

At the very moment Kanna finished speaking, Yoon Hamin’s expression hardened.

He was bewildered by the fact that the beings he wanted to defeat so desperately were merely ordinary people.

Though he questioned if it was truly the case, Kanna’s gaze was unwavering.

Her low voice, which only spoke the truth, shook his heart.

Kanna felt a fear of what might happen if Yoon Hamin chose not to fight after learning this truth.

But after fighting and killing all the monsters, if he found out that they too were, in fact, human, she was terrified he would hate her for not saying anything.

Yoon Hamin’s gaze wavered.

His hand covered his mouth.

He realized that this fight wasn’t simply about the monsters’ amusement.

He belatedly recognized it was an endless war born of learned fear and learned hatred.

“…But, but no one ever told me anything like that.”

Murmurs escaped Yoon Hamin’s lips.

He soon recalled the lines from history books that unfolded in his mind.

“Maybe it was because they all wrote it from their perspective, so I didn’t know.”

Kanna silently affirmed that statement.

Ch. 133 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 133

A day has passed since I encountered the shocking truth. As June gradually comes to an end, I checked the calendar and sighed deeply, realizing the weekend was approaching.

Today, I walked along the barrier with Kanna on my back, but even in the midst of it, my emotions were becoming increasingly turbulent.

I had strapped the weapon I received from Orca to my waist, but the current situation felt peaceful enough that I wouldn’t even have time to use it. Just knowing that they might come looking for us soon made me anxious.

No matter how much I think about it, I couldn’t help but feel dazed, wondering if this was truly right.

I had learned that monsters were just monsters. I had been taught that they were to be excluded, and that was what I intended to do.

But after pondering over what Kanna had said yesterday, it drove me almost insane.

It was hard to accept the fact that those we fought were simply a stronger, new form of humanity.

The content was contradictory to what I had learned. It made me question what I was fighting for.

No, it was definitely to save those who were unfairly suffering. That hadn’t changed.

It was just that knowing the opponent who attacks is a bit unsettling.

If Kanna’s words are true, then the beginning of this agonizing chain was humanity. The humanity within this barrier.

Was it the fault of the predecessors who deceived future generations with narrow-minded perspectives and convenient interpretations? Or was it the doing of those in power who turned a blind eye while knowing? I couldn’t be certain, which only led to further worry.

“…Kanna.”

“Yeah?”

Kanna, who was resting against my back, responded to my call. The gentle vibration felt when she answered indicated that Kanna was right next to me.

“If monsters were just people, how should people treat monsters?”

I cautiously asked Kanna.

The world Kanna sees is far away. It’s a world where she doesn’t even exist.

I thought that someone with such eyes would surely understand.

“Is that so?”

But the answer I received was completely different from what I had thought. A naive question, voiced with the tone of someone who had never truly contemplated it.

I had expected her to imply that if those monsters outside the barrier were also people, we should consider how to treat them. Instead, Kanna responded as if it didn’t matter at all.

I tilted my head, wondering why she even brought it up then.

“I assumed you said it because you were worried I might care.”

“…There’s nothing like that.”

Kanna said quietly. Her bandaged hand lightly rested on my shoulder. Since Kanna couldn’t apply much pressure with her fingers, it felt merely like a gentle weight on my shoulder.

“I just thought that if I said they’re the same kind of people later, you might regret it. I wanted to give you a choice beforehand.”

“I see.”

“What were you thinking, Hamin?”

I briefly looked up.

We were getting closer to the barrier. Today was another day where I would leave Kanna at the same spot and spend time quietly talking.

In truth, I wanted this moment to last as long as no one disturbed us.

Talking with Kanna never grew tiring. I felt like we could continue our conversation indefinitely without worrying about running out of topics.

If we could exchange serious discussions as well as light jokes, I would be satisfied with that.

“If monsters are people, then is this ultimately a war between people?”

“Maybe.”

“According to Kanna, the people inside the barrier are the ones who were wrong first. But that’s not the case anymore, right? In this era, aren’t the monsters the ones at fault?”

From a broader perspective, one could argue that the people inside the barrier were the first to err.

Whether it was a political issue or a psychological one, the beings that had adapted were seen as threats, which was what led to them being driven out.

But those were concepts far too burdensome for today's humanity to accept. We had been taught that monsters were simply monsters, and when they breached the barrier, bl**d and tears stained the ground.

If that's the case, then who is truly in the wrong right now?

If someone asked for an apology, wouldn't repeating the words a few times suffice? Hatred births revenge, and revenge once again breeds more revenge.

The learned hatred has produced the present monsters. The learned fear has created today's humanity.

"…What would you wish for, Kanna? How can we achieve a better outcome?"

Which direction should we take to reach a world where Kanna could smile?

"I don't know."

"…Really?"

"But, I just hope that Hamin wins everything."

Kanna seemed indifferent, but she expressed her desires nonetheless, with a heart full of hope.

"I just don't want to cry at the end."

"……."

Kanna's voice seemed to tremble with tears. I felt a lump forming in my throat as well.

Because I wanted to see you smile. It reminded me of Kanna before losing her memories.

Even before the memories faded, and after they were lost, I couldn’t help but think Kanna was still Kanna.

Thinking back to how hard she had run around for me even then made me feel both happy and saddened by the fact that it had led to this situation.

What should I do?

“Alright, I’ll work hard and definitely win.”

“Yeah.”

Kanna described me as her sole hope. She said that even if the barriers collapsed and humanity perished, I would be the sole survivor.

Could that be why I couldn’t smile? Is that why I said I was crying?

If that’s the case, I wanted to change that fate. I wanted to create a world where everything Kanna witnessed was a lie. I wanted to change the miserable future so that I could tell Kanna she was a liar.

Look, isn’t this happiness? I wanted to tell her that.

“Still, it feels a bit unsettling to think of them as people.”

“Yeah?”

As I murmured and glanced up at the barrier, Kanna also slightly lifted her body. Reaching the barrier and looking up at it made it feel like half of this world was taken up by the wall, which felt strange.

“The opponent we have to fight is a person, right? Isn’t that how war goes usually?”

“…Yeah, maybe we should think of what to do about the just fighting monsters?”

“Are there monsters that don’t fight?”

“Yeah, they probably have separate villages.”

“That sounds… not great. If they all come together, everyone will d*e, right?”

“Probably…”

From Kanna’s uncertainty, it seemed that humanity’s extinction was due to the actions of certain monsters. If she had been aware, she would have explained the result of all monsters charging.

“But it seems a bit difficult if they don’t fight.”

“Why?”

“If we k*ll the monsters, then what happens if the monster village seeks revenge for their dead?”

I couldn’t help but ponder.

To find peace, I must break this chain, but I was worried about how to sever it.

If I think of myself as a hero saving the people within the barrier, it seems there would be many things I must do.

Even if I’m labeled as a murderer, I have no retort if they are clear enemies and the context is war; murderers are then called heroes.

But I didn’t want to become a hero like that. I had stood up wanting to offer hope to everyone, but that meaning had now been distorted.

I spread out a mat I had bought and placed Kanna on it. Kanna, removing the slippers fitted over her bandaged feet, stretched her legs and sat down.

“Have you decided?”

“Decided what?”

“To k*ll the monsters.”

At her blunt words, I froze for a moment.

In Kanna’s words, monsters had already become one with humanity in my heart. They were individuals deprived of chances to enter the barrier because they were shunned by others.

Was it truly right to k*ll someone among them who was extremely outraged? I began to wonder if such anger meant they hadn’t forgotten the past.

As long as they had rampaged and killed thousands, there was nothing more to say. But it was a different story when it came to how I, as a murderer, felt about someone else killing hundreds or thousands.

I didn’t know what kind of future Kanna saw, but I wouldn’t live life reassuring myself that I wouldn’t d*e. I wasn’t immortal.

Even the idea of everyone except myself dying seemed unbearable.

That’s why, to prevent it, I was fine with being a murderer. I was willing to obtain peace by killing someone.

“That’s how it should be.”

What I desired wasn’t a peace that countless people would achieve. If truly the world’s fate rested in my hands, then the peace that humanity within this barrier receives would simply be ancillary.

I wanted Kanna to smile. I hoped Kanna would continue to live. I just wanted her to stay by my side.

Kanna opened her eyes wide in surprise at my cheerful response and looked up at me.

I smirked at her.

“Yesterday, you asked if there was anything I could do for you, right?”

At those words, Kanna nodded quietly.

“I want you to stay by my side as you said yesterday. There’s no need to worry about whether you’ll be alive in the future; I’ll make sure of that.”

“…Hamin.”

“Of course, if you don’t want to, then there’s nothing I can do about it.”

At the end, I unconsciously stepped back a bit, feeling nervous.

I worried that if I pressed too close, Kanna might find it unbearable and distance herself from me.

It wasn’t time to receive an answer yet. Even if I did receive one, I thought it would be appropriate to get it from Kanna when her memories returned. In this situation, it felt almost like coercion.

Whenever I asked myself if pouring out overflowing emotions was really the right thing to do, I was confident that I would answer no.

I sighed involuntarily due to my lamentable self.

As I swallowed hard to soothe my dry throat, Kanna chuckled softly.

“…Okay.”

Hearing those words made my heart race. It felt like my face was burning.

“Uh, uh…? You’re not against it?”

“Why would I be against it?”

“No, it’s just…”

I absentmindedly scratched my itching cheeks with my fingertip. I couldn’t hide the joy swelling up amidst the confusion.

The corners of my lips began to rise again.

Ch. 134 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 134

How many people are there who choose d*ath because they want to d*e?

When the future seems bleak and you no longer have the courage to live, it feels like choosing to d*e might be the easiest option, a decision made by someone who is cornered at the very end.

I wasn’t saying this because I wanted to d*e myself. I was merely expressing my thoughts out of a sense of resignation.

However, if there was a chance for me to live, truly live, I thought it would be nice to stay by Hamin’s side.

This memory, which feels both foreign and familiar, cried out to me. It wanted to see the end of this story.

I also sent my heart along with that wish. If Hamin could smile at the end, that would be enough.

There was a difference between trying to k*ll someone knowing they are a person and unknowingly killing them only to realize it afterward.

That’s why, after witnessing Hamin’s determination to fight back even while knowing it, I couldn’t help but smile.

Hamin wanted me to stay by his side. I wanted to be there for him.

I hoped that Hamin would stand tall and smile, victorious as both a hero and a human. And I wanted to see that with my own eyes.

So, I nodded in response to Hamin’s voice asking me to stay by him.

I wanted to be there for as long as I could. Still, I wouldn’t lean on him too much.

Just as Hamin had his own role to play, I had mine.

“Kanna.”

“Yeah?”

“I’m curious, why do you need a notebook?”

Evening.

Hamin tilted his head, questioning me while looking at the notebook in my hand.

It was impossible for me to bring the notebook while out looking for a place to stay. That’s why I had asked for it. The notebook, however, didn’t contain any content worth mentioning.

I wanted to write, but I couldn’t due to the lack of strength in my fingertips.

After stopping my pen from fidgeting, I glanced at Hamin’s expression and pondered how to respond for a moment. That contemplation didn’t last long.

“…rehabilitation treatment?”

“Rehabilitation treatment?”

“Yeah.”

I could talk about other things, but this was something I couldn’t disclose. Hamin had consistently said he didn’t want to hear about it, so I didn’t want to repeat the same story again.

I could hold the pen lightly with my fingertips without causing pain. I showed that to Hamin and smiled.

I thought it might pass by quietly, but Hamin was deep in thought.

“…Got it.”

Since it felt a bit anticlimactic, I wasn’t really in a good mood either.

“…Why? Is something wrong?”

I asked, feeling a bit anxious, and Hamin waved his hand dismissively.

“No, I was just wondering when the monster might react… I guess I’m a bit anxious?”

“Ah.”

Though it had only been three days, to us in a rush, even that felt like a precious amount of time.

In such times, simply sitting quietly in our lodging and repeating the act of sitting by the barrier created a sense of unease that was understandable.

Three days. By now, the cracked barrier could have started looking for us after making any adjustments.

Because of this, Hamin had to be cautious about turning on the device.

“I think it’ll be fine.”

“Why? Did you figure something out?”

“It’s not that far from where it cracked, and if the crack wasn’t caused by the monster, they might have noticed by now.”

As I mumbled, Hamin tilted his head in confusion.

“What do you mean, the crack wasn’t caused by the monster?”

“If it were the monster, it would be better to destroy it all at once. There’s no need to give the heroes time to gather like this.”

At that, Hamin’s eyes widened.

“Now that you mention it, the monster has been using tactics like diversion all this time.”

He rubbed his chin with his hand. He started contemplating something, and that thought soon turned into a guess about the truth.

“So, could it be that this time they intentionally let us know they were here, and then planned to hit somewhere else? But if they made a crack in the barrier, doesn’t that mean there’s already a totem there…?”

Struggling to find the truth, he cast me a pleading glance, as if asking for confirmation or denial.

No matter how much I knew things that others didn’t, I couldn’t know everything the monster was doing.

So, gathering this vague information I had, piecing together bits from my memory, and drawing conclusions was the only thing I could do.

Thus, even when Hamin looked at me as if asking for help, I couldn’t say anything with certainty.

“…I don’t know?”

As I tilted my head, Hamin covered his mouth and groaned, looking troubled. Shortly after, he reached out his hand to me.

“?”

“Don’t hold the pen for too long. You’ll hurt your hand.”

“No, suddenly…?”

“Anyway, it’s almost time for bed, right?”

Those words left me feeling dazed.

This was the pen I would use after Hamin fell asleep. If it was taken away before bedtime, I couldn’t understand what I was supposed to write with.

Did he know this and was doing it on purpose?

Of course, he might be doing this out of concern for me, but still, the thought that he might know something nagged at me.

“Quickly.”

“…Okay.”

I was grateful for his concern, but I never expected him to take the pen as well.

I sighed softly and handed the pen over to Hamin.

—

Outside the barrier.

The residual magical power released from Kanna’s body was not strong enough to be recognized by others. However, the monsters, sensitive to the flow of magical power, quickly noticed it.

If humans turning into monsters were adapted to magical power, then monsters themselves had mutated due to magical power, making them sensitive to even Kanna’s weak flow.

Because of that, the monsters tried to rush towards Kanna’s magic and bumped against the barrier, causing it to crack.

Reika stared blankly at the monsters.

Because of this, the barrier had cracked, and as a result, the heroes were likely converging on this place. However, she was at a loss about where to move these monsters quickly.

If she wanted to use the cracked spot, there couldn’t be a more troublesome situation than this, but she felt it might be better to break through somewhere else now.

Humans couldn’t ignore this cracked wall anyway. They would naturally focus their attention here, and she judged it would be better to attack elsewhere at that timing.

Of course, humans might be considering how to use this for a diversionary tactic. But even if they knew that, ultimately, breaking the wall depended on the monster’s intentions, and pinpointing that spot in this long barrier was a difficult task.

“…I just need to handle the one up there.”

The monster grinned and looked up.

Originally, her strategy was to slowly chip away at the barrier and then crash in all at once, so she didn’t care who was above.

Breaking through the veil that blocks the flow of magical power,

and shattering a barrier that allows monsters and monsters to pass through.

That was what the monster Reika was meant to do.

From high up, humans or monsters couldn’t see each other, but Reika was confident.

It had been quite some time since the wall had cracked, so she expected that someone would surely venture out to see what was happening outside the wall.

As expected, the person standing atop the giant wall saw the monsters gathering against it and gulped.

Until a report came in saying the monsters had retreated, this situation wouldn’t end.

People could not stray far beyond the area encircled by the veil.

Thus, it was the biggest problem that they couldn’t stop the monsters from ramming into the wall.

Humans felt anxious in this ongoing standoff,

and the monster was lying in wait, hoping to take advantage of that situation.

“Hmm.”

The corners of her lips curled up.

She thought about looking for another friend, but she felt it might be fine to handle this alone for now.

Suddenly, she noticed several monsters sneaking away to one side.

Turning her head, a sensation awakened her instincts.

“…Ah.”

She had felt it before.

Something that should have died but was still alive, an uncomfortable vibration signaling her continued existence. Even now, she wished it would cease, yet it came creeping back like a leech.

Reika didn’t like this situation at all. She frowned, and her unsmiling face soon turned to irritation.

“You annoying thing.”

She thought about amusing herself with the incompetent creatures squirming, but instead of fearing her, they grew more frantic and chaotic.

The same monsters had died, and the tactic she had considered countless times had been unraveled.

The newly created type of creature was meant to exhaust the fighters to the point of feeling their limits, but hadn't they figured that out as well?

Reika scratched her neck with her nails.

Frustration bubbled up, and she scratched harder.

"Thinking about it just pisses me off…"

She clicked her tongue and turned her head.

She intentionally shifted her gaze away from the creature nearby that was revealing its position.

What if that was a bait to lure her out? She quickly turned her head.

After all, the barrier was wide, and if she took care of just one person above, she could easily lead several large monsters to strike elsewhere.

She fiddled with the bead in her hand. She tossed it into the air and caught it.

Then she turned back around.

Ch. 135 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 135

How should one respond to things that are bothersome in life?

Some people would avoid them, saying it’s a hassle, while others would argue that something that isn’t right can’t be accepted. Neither side could be judged as right or wrong.

People are all different, and there are as many interpretations and choices as there are individuals.

Thus, from Reika’s perspective, the most rational choice was made.

There would be no responsibility for the choice taken.

Therefore, a person became a monster.

If it was once a title received after being unjustly expelled, now it was entirely through her own actions that she was called a monster.

She wasn’t fully aware that the label of being a monster stemmed from her own actions.

There was no one to inform her of this, and the hatred she had learned made her loathe that very fact, so she did not stop.

It did not arise from within her.

The learned hatred ultimately directed her feelings of displeasure in a similar fashion, leading her to hate anything that did not sit well with her.

If she didn’t like something, she would dislike it and try to exclude it; that became Reika’s way of thinking.

No one was there to stop her.

The humanity within the Barrier Park was a small society, but at the same time, it had a vast forest, making it natural for any activity to go unnoticed.

There were no eyes or laws to suppress them.

Whether one lived or died, with such a sparse population, it was difficult to apply any grand notions of human survival.

They simply gathered and lived together, avoiding any issues that did not concern them, often going to hunt monsters only to d*e easily at the hands of those very monsters, detached from d*ath.

Even while appearing to follow generations, they did not have civilization, which was why they sometimes displayed primitive traits.

They would consume some monsters while also raising others.

All they did was dwell in abandoned buildings, holding onto what was useful.

And from that, a monster who learned hatred from records and literature took a step forward.

“Ugh.”

For three days, she plotted countless times to k*ll Kanna Aurora, who had annoyed her by saying, “I’m right here.”

She knew Kanna Aurora would be a persistent obstacle to her plans, so the urgency to eliminate her now pushed her forward.

On the fifth day, she slightly collapsed a spot that the monsters had damaged with body slams while distorting the veil.

She didn’t want to leave it alone since it was clear someone observing from above would report any irregularities.

Thus, the person standing atop the barrier, watching the monsters, was being killed by stones.

“d*e, d*e, d*e, d*e.”

A large rock held in Reika’s hand came crashing down below.

Crack, crack. The sound of skin being crushed and bones shattering was unpleasantly disturbing.

However, no one was there to hear it, and Reika, who was creating that sound, was smiling as if she found it enjoyable.

Before anyone could scream, the stones burst their eyes, crushed their noses, and shattered their teeth.

Their lips and gums were torn, and bl**d flowed from their split heads to the point they could not open their eyes.

“Ugh…”

Their eyes grew ever more haggard.

Is a hero truly dying so futilely?

Though she spoke like that, humanity, having overcome and adapted to unrefined magical power, was far stronger than existing humanity.

For that reason, even if it was a hero, there was no way to deal with it in a one-on-one confrontation.

As magical power seeped and trickled from her hands, Reika grinned.

“Is that all?”

What was visible on the outside was hatred.

But what lay beneath was amusement.

She moved with the mindset that she had a justification, thinking it was acceptable to act as she pleased within the barrier, desiring to overturn everything.

The stone in her hand swiftly crushed a person’s fingers.

“Ugh!”

The hero pulled outside the barrier was dying slowly.

Her body could not accept unrefined magical power.

The magical power mixed in the air was stealthily burrowing into their body.

Having grown accustomed only to refined magical power, the body could not endure the violence of unrefined magical power and went berserk.

Suffering and flailing, the human body eventually succumbed, ceasing its struggles only after the extremities started necrosing and they breathed their last.

Although she could have easily killed with her abilities, Reika did not take that path.

Opportunities to draw a person out and k*ll them were scarce, and this was an opportunity to vent her emotions, so she did not want to let it go.

“Ah, I already feel great.”

Between the cracks she made in the barrier, she let a few small monsters through.

Thinking that being able to k*ll a hero first was a good start, she rose her body.

Stretching, Reika kicked the corpse at her feet aside and passed through the crack.

“Habar.”

“……”

“Habar, remember our promise.”

“…Did we?”

With a yawn, the monster sauntered forward, looking lethargic.

“Reika, but this time, it really isn’t dangerous, right?”

And behind Habar was Rendel.

The two, waiting at a prearranged spot, cast their gazes toward Reika.

Habar looked at Reika with a dull expression as if it didn’t matter to him,

while Rendel appeared a bit anxious over the fact that his former friend had died.

Despite the annoyance and worry, the reason they gathered here was solely due to Reika, who had the ability to command monsters and conveniently utilize them.

Reika drooped her shoulders and pulled out a purple orb from her shabby pocket.

Two for Habar, two for Rendel.

“Is this enough?”

“…What do we do with it?”

“I got it, but if it’s dangerous, I’m running away.”

Habar and Rendel first received and checked the items.

Only then did they lift their heads as if to follow Reika.

Just bringing this home would ensure a good meal, so it was something worthwhile.

Since it would emerge alive once the seal was broken, it could be eaten or bred, making it better the more they had.

“Habar, I’ll head over there for a bit, so signal me if you need to collapse the barrier.”

“Okay.”

Reika’s gaze shifted from Habar to Rendel.

“Rendel, devour any annoying ones beside you like before.”

“I’m already eating something though.”

Reika was taken aback by Rendel’s words and widened her eyes.

“What are you eating?”

“Just, the one beside me…? Sorry, I can’t quite remember.”

“Then, just stay still for now and eat whatever the others tell you to.”

“Got it.”

After saying that, Reika dashed away again.

She was internally delighted by the fact that she could fight and crush someone to d*ath once more.

While running, she kicked the corpse she had killed earlier with a stone once again.

Yet, she moved forward, showing no particular interest, as if not even glancing at the body.

*

The collapse of the barrier was approaching its fifth instance.

As a result, people’s anxieties grew even greater.

While repairs continued for the damaged barrier, the cracks widened before any construction could even begin, and monsters began to pour through those gaps, tightening an atmosphere that had nearly loosened.

In an instant, heroes were summoned to eliminate the monsters pouring through the cracks, only for news of the barrier collapsing elsewhere to arrive at that moment.

“No, why is a barrier that wasn’t even cracked suddenly collapsing!”

While having a totem makes breaking down barriers easy, with Habar’s help, there was no need for that at all.

Unaware of that fact, people panicked and quickly spread word through the communication network.

Will it burst? Won’t it? Caught on that precarious line, monsters broke in just as they were about to ease up.

And it was just when they tried to gather forces for communication that another section collapsed, leaving people in disarray.

Of course, they could always set up positions as they prepared for any exceptions or unforeseen circumstances, but the time taken to grasp the situation in detail and spread the word prevented them from protecting the other citizens.

“Spread the word quickly!”

Thus shouted a hero.

And mocking that, Reika leapt over the second collapsed barrier.

“Hmm… it’s definitely an unusual flow.”

Feeling the flow of refined magical power, she snapped her fingers.

In response, a new monster flapped its wings, flying through the gap in the barrier.

A massive bird standing at three meters tall without even flapping its wings swooped down as Reika envisioned, grabbing any nearby person.

Then, once it soared into the sky, it relaxed its grip.

“Uwaaaaaaaaaa!”

A human scream echoed, abruptly cut off upon impact with the ground.

Seeing the corpse with a broken neck and shattered bones, Reika nodded.

So this is what it looks like when a person falls from above and dies, she thought, and snapped her fingers again.

Screams followed once more,

and once again, screams were suddenly silenced.

Ch. 136 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 136

The barrier cracked. This meant that it could soon collapse. To be honest, it was obvious just by looking at it. The atmosphere was not normal.

Even without someone telling me, I knew I had to move away from there.

But how many people would run away after seeing that?

Those with some money on the outskirts might just feel a bit scared and think of it as an excuse for a holiday, deciding to stay somewhere else temporarily.

But what about those who had no money?

Those who had to pay for accommodation every day and couldn’t afford it?

Such people couldn’t make the choice to leave and enjoy themselves like those with money.

The barrier might collapse, but it might not, right? There was no reason to spend their money on that. They had to save. There was no room to pay for accommodation when they were just trying to eat and live day by day.

Such thoughts bound them to this spot.

Is being poor a crime?

Is not acting a sin?

The monsters appeared as if asking those questions, bringing terror with them.

And conversely, to those who believed the barrier was safe and remained sturdy, the monster Reika questioned, how could they feel at ease with such a wall?

“Hold my hand tight, Mom!”

“Mommmmmm!”

A mother of one child grabbed her child instead of the father who had gone to work and ran in the opposite direction.

The cracked barrier was one thing, but it was the unexpected collapse that no one had anticipated.

In an instant, the monsters poured in, and amidst them, a bird-like monster in the sky began to shriek loudly.

“Everyone, run away!!”

A man shouted in despair.

And at that moment, the bird monster that heard that voice swooped down from the sky, capturing a person with its giant foot.

“!”

The gazes of those fleeing around gathered together.

It was just unimaginable that someone who was leading the way and showing the direction to flee was suddenly grabbed by the monster and taken into the sky.

They had run out fearing that the monsters would trample on them in their homes, yet now, the monster circling in the sky was snatching them away—could that even be justified?

The child holding their mother’s hand gasped at the sight.

“Don’t look…!”

The mother tried to cover the child’s eyes with her hand, but the image of a person being taken away by the giant bird was already etched in the child’s vision.

And without anything to understand the emotions of the mother who had the child, someone pointed a finger at the sky.

“Uh, uhhh! It’s dropping him!”

“Ahhhhh!”

Hearing that voice, a woman lifted her head and screamed.

The bird in the distance had dropped the person it held in its claws to the ground.

Humans didn’t have wings.

In an environment where only those with the appropriate abilities existed, even heroes were bound to d*e.

Just as there are heroes who can engage in aerial battles and those who cannot, altitude is absolute.

“Quickly, quickly run away!!”

“The monster will come looking for us again!”

People hastily fled.

Amidst them, a child stumbled and fell.

The child’s mother gasped and turned to look at the child, who was crying loudly.

“Mom, Mom!!”

“No, no…”

As a new monster discarded one person, it crossed the sky to throw another one again. Knowing this, people stopped running and hid in buildings.

As everyone tried to hide, all that was visible was a person still running, unable to find refuge in a building, and a child lying exposed on the ground.

The mother rushed toward it.

And at that moment, the monster swooped down swiftly, and the mother, noticing the people moving away, looked after them.

“Just my child, just my child…!”

With a thud.

As if it were the last wish, the mother disappeared while trying to hold her child’s hand.

Only the child left behind sobbed in anguish, shedding tears.

“Mom, Mommm!!”

Thus, a second flower bloomed on the ground.

*

A commotion broke out.

Kanna, who had been in one place four times, nodded at the thought of not going today, and the tragedy that followed was this.

The monsters burst through the collapsed walls, crushing the buildings closest to them, while the flying monsters began lifting people and dropping them to the ground.

Seeing people dying from falling after being caught in the sky made me feel like I didn’t have enough bodies to spare.

I tried to rescue those trapped at home who couldn’t escape due to whatever abilities they had, but at this rate, a significant number of people would be captured by that bird monster and face the risk of falling to their deaths.

I had to hope other heroes would come to rescue them.

It wouldn’t do me any good to take out my device and contact anyone right now; Kanna was my priority.

People would be saved by heroes anyway.

As long as I could rescue Kanna, that was enough.

I wasn’t even wearing the academy uniform, so there was no one who would blame me.

“Hamin, are you okay?”

Kanna, who was on my back, spoke with a worried tone.

Knowing she couldn’t fight while being carried, she said this.

I wasn’t okay. Carrying Kanna while having to fight a monster was putting both her and me in danger.

“…I’m okay. I’ll take you to a safe place.”

“Okay.”

Kanna responded in a small voice.

“By the way.”

“Yeah?”

“Rendel would probably run away just from being threatened.”

“…Should I k*ll him in one shot before he has a chance to escape?”

“No, just holding him down so he can’t run away will force him to spit it out.”

Kanna’s words made me tilt my head.

Could I really hold a monster down and keep it from escaping?

Everyone knows that capturing them alive is harder than killing them.

Besides, there’s also that monster called Reika.

“It sounds difficult…”

“Just do whatever you want to do, Hamin. It’s just that it might be possible, you know.”

Kanna shared that information with me.

Now that she knew I was human, was she perhaps giving me a way to avoid having to k*ll?

If that was the case, I’d be really grateful. It was probably something Kanna would think about to that extent.

“Kanna, is it a bit safe around here?”

We had moved far away from the collapsed barrier.

This place was less chaotic than before.

“…Kanna?”

But for some reason, Kanna didn’t think of getting off my back. Her voice had stiffened slightly and she held onto me tightly, making me worried.

“Are you scared?”

“…No.”

Kanna answered with a voice that seemed tense and then gradually loosened her grip on my back.

“You can put me down.”

Honestly, I was worried.

I had brought a suitcase, and the idea of leaving her behind while sitting on top of it sounded nice, but I was worried about leaving Kanna alone who couldn’t use her hands and feet.

“……”

Since I couldn’t easily move away from my position, Kanna forced a smile.

“I’m fine, so go ahead. But if there’s another girl you haven’t seen before, then really run away.”

“…Another girl I haven’t seen before?”

“Habar—he can break the barrier by sheer strength without a totem.”

At hearing that, I felt a shiver down my spine.

I had heard of him before, but hadn’t this barrier collapsed without any warning this time?

If this were the doing of the monster Habar, it would truly be unbearable.

I nodded at Kanna’s warning.

Sitting demurely on top of my suitcase with her hands clasped, she also nodded at me.

Seeing Kanna gave me confidence, and with the thought that it would be okay, I turned to seek a better future.

I reminded myself that staying bound by this unease would change nothing.

*

Yoon Hamin walked on.

I saw him rushing toward the place where the barrier had suddenly collapsed.

After watching him for a while, I hugged my knees and buried my face in them.

I felt my head heating up.

I began to question what I had done.

Had the unrefined magical power seeped in, slowly starting to heal me? I had come to my senses without even realizing it.

There was no feeling of suddenly returning at some point; I just found myself back to normal.

But that didn’t mean the memory before I lost it and after was clearly separated.

When I lost my memory, I didn’t recognize the moment of its loss, which created a sense of disconnection. But when I regained my memory, that moment became mine.

As a result, the actions I had taken when I regained my memory vividly returned to my mind.

I felt ashamed about what I had done to Hamin.

Even if my mental age had regressed, there was no need to go that far.

I couldn’t even imagine that I would act so childish; embarrassment surged within me.

I had exerted all I had to urge Hamin to leave quickly and even acted.

And the moment I saw Yoon Hamin receding into the distance, I couldn’t help but let out a deep sigh and cool my flushed face.

No matter how close people are, there are things that can and cannot be said.

“Ugh, ughhh…”

I must be insane.

Ch. 137 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 137

Yoon Hamin ran out quickly. He didn’t look back even as someone died nearby.

Although the monster was now charging in, the heroes were already close to the cracked barrier, making it inevitable that they would be delayed in receiving any information or arriving here.

And that gap in time was the time given to Yoon Hamin.

Before the hero arrived to save the people, before confronting the monsters, it was Yoon Hamin’s job to confront them first.

Otherwise, if he fought with a sword in front of the heroes, it would look strange.

He wasn’t wearing the academy uniform, nor was he with a mentor to explain his presence. If he swung a sword in plain clothes without a clear identity, it was obvious he would be stopped.

Knowing that, Yoon Hamin couldn’t afford to stop even as enemies approached.

Thinking of Kanna waiting for him alone on the carrier made his hesitation disappear.

People were caught by the flying monster and bloomed red flowers on the ground. Monsters charging in crushed buildings, and those who couldn’t escape inside were ground to pieces.

[KRWAARRRR!!!]

The monster’s deafening roar announced its presence with a sound that pierced the ears.

The ground shook with a pounding resonance, causing the footsteps of nearby people to slow down.

Amidst that, Yoon Hamin resolutely kicked off the ground and ran, swinging his sword. As he distanced himself from Kanna, Yoon Hamin, now efficient in his strength, swiftly blocked the monster with lighter movements.

Five slashes.

Five scars appeared on the monster’s body almost all at once. With a puff, as he expelled dark particles from his sword, his ability shone brightly.

At the moment it glittered, the monster Yoon Hamin had charged at scattered into the air without leaving a corpse behind. This was the fate of the forcibly mutated monsters, not those who had adapted.

Yoon Hamin turned his head as if it was the natural outcome.

“……”

Yoon Hamin’s eyes met with a girl who had black hair and red eyes, and he glared at her with a fierce expression. His gaze seemed to burn with a fire about to erupt at any moment.

Reika tilted her head, looking at Yoon Hamin, who glared at her as if to k*ll her.

They had not specifically met, and when they had faced each other in battle before, she had merely seen him as one of many heroes, so it was natural that he had not left an impression.

But Yoon Hamin felt differently.

He was the only monster that had broken through the barrier and was already recognized and remembered as the greatest monster of this era, causing countless casualties.

Reika thought it was of no significance, and for some reason, Yoon Hamin shared the same thought as the monster.

‘It’s of no significance.’

He believed that since he was already standing there, he had enough will to fight.

Reika’s weapon was her raw strength and magical power as a monster. Her abilities revolved around compressing magical power or monsters, so while she could serve the role of an operational headquarters, her battle capabilities weren’t impressive.

In contrast, Yoon Hamin’s abilities were specialized for combat.

The problem was that he was restricted by Rendel’s abilities, and no matter how optimal his condition was, defeating a monster alone was not easy.

Although he lacked abilities, he was skilled at managing magical power. Humanity that had overcome and adapted to the unrefined magical power emitted by the world was naturally stronger than those who hid inside the barrier.

Yoon Hamin was acutely aware of this fact. It was terrifying. The realization that someone might try to k*ll him felt chillingly serious.

“……”

Yoon Hamin momentarily cleared his mind.

Even if what stood before him was a monster, it was not necessary to charge in recklessly.

Remembering that he was doing this not to fight for humanity but to regain his abilities, he turned his head.

He checked one last time the girl who was a monster with short hair down to her shoulders. He recognized that while her hair color matched, she looked a bit cuter than the monster called Reika.

If she weren’t a monster inside, she might have been loved a lot within this barrier. That was uncertain, and Yoon Hamin had no interest in such matters.

His hand, which had been reaching for the sword, froze, and his gaze fixed on a single point.

Another figure appeared among the approaching monsters.

Soon, he realized that it was the very target he was after and gripped the hilt tightly.

And at that moment, Reika, who had not missed the opportunity, grabbed the three totems she had tucked between her fingers and swung them.

“—Aren’t you supposed to save the people behind you before you fight me?”

Reika seemed to have a moment of leisure.

The human wanting to fight her was originally someone who fought to protect humanity. They were called heroes, so Reika despised them.

They were figures obstructing her, so it was natural.

And right before her, stood the one seeking to fight her.

Since he looked like a hero, it pricked at her sense of mission.

Even now, birds were picking up people and blooming flowers on the ground. Crows were appearing on the damp, soaked earth. She wondered why they were standing here instead of saving them.

What Reika hadn’t considered was that Yoon Hamin wasn’t standing here out of a mission.

“…So what?”

“What?”

To Yoon Hamin, it didn’t matter whether people fell to the ground and died or were trampled to d*ath by monsters.

“What does that have to do with me?”

The flying totem expanded massively behind Yoon Hamin into a monster. The growing body, expanding as if it were spreading in the air, turned to Yoon Hamin and growled threateningly.

In front of him were the monsters climbing over the barrier. Behind him were the monsters released from the totem thrown by Reika.

Surrounded in front and back, Yoon Hamin swiftly drew his sword and readied his stance.

Knowing that the existence of Reika was the most threatening to Kanna, he couldn’t help but be hostile, but he determined the priority was Rendel.

“If you can truly ignore the people dying over there, I’ll play along.”

“Uaaahhh!!!”

Again, he heard someone d*e. And that sound was soon drowned out by the roar of monsters.

Thud, thud. Beyond the resonant vibrations, Yoon Hamin forcefully stamped his foot on the ground.

Reika took out a square cube she had been holding. She flicked it towards Yoon Hamin, and it flew swiftly like a b*llet across her fingers.

Yoon Hamin’s sword accurately intercepted the middle of the cube. With a swish, it was sliced apart and split to the sides of Yoon Hamin.

As it split apart, explosions echoed around Yoon Hamin, but he ran forward unscathed.

The barrier of starlight surrounding him was protecting him.

“!”

“Reika, that’s the ability that I consumed…?”

Yoon Hamin heard Rendel, surprised from behind.

In truth, the person right in front of him was Reika, who had intended to let Yoon Hamin enjoy himself as she was pleased. But now seeing Yoon Hamin using the remnants of the ability he had consumed, she couldn’t pass it by without saying something.

Even though he had consumed the ability, it was only sealed and could not be used, making it impossible for her to help.

Reika smiled with the corner of her lips raised as she watched Yoon Hamin charge.

“…Really?”

That means right now, he doesn’t have any proper abilities at all.

The ones hiding inside the barrier like cowards would surely fall short if they lacked abilities.

The moment Reika heard Rendel’s words, she was convinced of her victory. There were countless stronger heroes, and she had repeatedly won against them, so her confidence surged.

In Reika’s hand was a capsule-shaped totem. She gulped it down.

“I’ll let you fight me as you wish, then.”

As if to say not to block her path, a beam of exploding stars raced toward Reika. She punched it away.

Her solidified fist bounced off Yoon Hamin’s sword, and with a clear sound, it vibrated through Yoon Hamin’s hand.

Yoon Hamin, pushed back by the sword, stared wide-eyed at Reika. Strengthened by her body, Reika launched a punch that wouldn’t connect with a sword or explosion, delivering a blow.

There wasn’t much of an air pressure effect or anything, but a direct hit would surely be a significant blow.

Yoon Hamin instinctively pulled back his foot, and Reika’s punch sliced through the air.

As he readied his stance and swung his sword down, Reika gritted her teeth and raised her arm to block.

The area to block the sword would have been from below her elbow to her fingertips.

Taking measure of the distance, Yoon Hamin stepped back and threw a glance at Rendel.

Rendel caught Yoon Hamin’s gaze and, unsure of what to do, ultimately decided to move away and ran toward the other humans.

Ch. 138 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 138

Kanna did not run quickly. The reason was that she was not used to walking, having been unable to walk for a while.

For her, what was familiar was the life on the bed, and if she had to move, she definitely needed Yoon Hamin.

Perhaps because of this, Kanna was cautious every time she took a step.

What if her foot got crushed again and she couldn’t walk? What if she collapsed here and could only call out for Hamin?

Embracing her fear, Kanna moved forward.

The flow of unrefined magical power, mixed into the world filled with magical energy, became a guide for Kanna.

In fact, even without that, she couldn’t go the wrong way when she looked up at the monsters charging in and saw the collapsed barriers.

Every time she saw people falling accompanied by a scream that seemed to tear her ears, Kanna’s body shivered. The fear did not diminish because it was the same monster that had devoured her limbs in the past.

Hiding closely against a building to avoid the monster’s gaze, Kanna swallowed hard. The thought of being caught by that monster again, of having her limbs crushed while she was still conscious, made her tremble and immobilized her.

Hiding under the roof of a building and shivering, Kanna squeezed her eyes shut. After a short while, she bit down on her teeth and moved forward again.

She felt she had to go; she judged that it would be problematic to let Yoon Hamin fight here alone.

Her abilities had been consumed by Rendel, and she was now restricted. If Rendel hadn't come, there would only be Reika to deal with, but with Rendel involved, it would become a two-on-one situation. It was clear that it would be an irreversible situation.

It would be better if the collapse on the other side and one came out from here, but Kanna already knew that they wouldn't come out separately.

With every slow step, the flow of unrefined magical power enveloped her body.

That magical power healed Kanna's body. Her fingertips were filled in, and the squished and swollen foot returned to its pretty form. Although wrapped in bandages, that state was not yet revealed to the world.

"…Yoon Hamin."

Kanna murmured. She thought that the hope of this world should not be in danger because of her, so she took a step.

If there had been no unrefined magical power, she wouldn't have walked, but she firmly believed that if she could walk, then this was the right choice to make.

The excess unrefined magical power that was left after treating Kanna began to slowly fill her body, just like other people accepting magical power.

So gradually that Kanna herself could hardly notice.

Thus, Kanna headed toward where Yoon Hamin was, and before long, she faced a monster.

The fallen monster, Rendel, wanting to tease Yoon Hamin.

Black hair, red eyes. Nobody would immediately recognize him just by the features of monsters, but Kanna quickly realized it was Rendel by looking at his hairstyle and appearance.

“…You.”

Kanna’s voice was cut off there.

She thought he was with Reika attacking Yoon Hamin, but here he was. No matter how cowardly he was, if Reika was by his side, he would have lent some strength, so why was he here?

Kanna tried to quickly grasp the situation with the information she had.

But as if there was no leisure, the monster’s cry and the heavy rumble of the ground snapped her awake.

“Human?”

Rendel’s eyes lit up. Most humans fled or fell dead nearby, but here was one walking alive.

What this situation indicated was that Kanna was a hero. A hero who had come to stop the monster that was Rendel.

Not at all, but Rendel, who had no way of knowing that, made that judgment and immediately prepared his stance.

Without knowing what the opponent’s abilities were in detail, he couldn’t recklessly use his own powers.

If the opponent’s abilities were extraordinarily troublesome, he even thought about returning the power of Yoon Hamin he had consumed and sealing Kanna’s abilities.

Seeing Rendel, Kanna hesitated for a moment and then became tense, pulling her feet back.

Rendel was slightly scared by the fact that she was a hero, and Kanna was scared by the fact that she could not defeat a monster.

In an unavoidable situation, the monster hurriedly urged them to fight.

A monster resembling a horse let out a roar and charged quickly at Kanna.

The sound of heavy hooves rushed toward her like a machine g*n, and with that, Rendel quickly charged in.

“Ah.”

Kanna sighed softly, feeling a moment of regret.

She should have just sat on her carrier, waiting for Yoon Hamin. She thought Reika and Rendel would cause trouble for Yoon Hamin, and if she had known they would go somewhere else like this…

A monster quickly closing in from far away. Just before being hit by a car, Kanna felt her head go blank like a person standing in front of her being turned white.

In her violet eyes, the pitch-black horse reflected. The distance was pelting closer wildly, making it impossible to gauge.

Instinctively, her warning bells rang. Her life was in danger, and in that situation, her magical power reacted.

To protect her master, the flow of magical power changed as if to instinctively warn her.

“Oh dear.”

The foolish sound came from none other than Rendel.

The horse monster was moving so ridiculously fast that he had no choice but to follow behind it, but there was a calculation that if the horse monster dealt with Kanna, it would either k*ll her, or if not, he would finish her off.

But that monster no longer existed. Something flared up, and without a need for identification, the monster leading the charge disappeared into thin air.

“……?”

Kanna tilted her head. The horse monster that had come up to her had vanished along with the light, making her wonder if it was using some ability.

It didn’t take long for her to realize it wasn’t that, but the question was how that ability was used.

Kanna questioned herself.

Rendel, facing such Kanna, felt fear.

In fact, no matter how scared he was, he was a monster that could k*ll a few strong heroes alone. Reluctantly, he had something received, and later if there was nothing else to eat, he had to survive by coming out this way.

Rendel’s fear stemmed from the simple thought that he could d*e. The fact that she was coming to attack him, and that he had to either dodge or block that fact was terrifying.

To Reika, it might just seem like he was making a fuss. But isn’t it odd for someone to not be scared when forced to enter someone else’s territory and be attacked?

Anyway, Rendel’s fear was originally that kind of feeling, but the moment he stood before Kanna, that fear transformed into the fear that he could d*e.

He had seen monsters d*e countless times. Since he brought in wild monster-like beings, he never really felt it was regrettable.

It felt mundane. It was a situation where only someone like Reika, who had to go through the trouble of bringing monsters and reducing them to totem size, might feel regretful.

There were always other monsters if one died.

But for a monster to evaporate in an instant, that was something he had neither heard nor seen before.

Rendel’s gaze wavered.

I’ve never heard of such a thing. I’ve never heard of such a human existing.

Kanna hesitated for a moment before looking at Rendel.

There were gigantic monsters around, but it would take a long time to get here. Since a monster like a cheetah wasn’t around yet, it would take a while to come.

During that time, Rendel briefly tried to gauge what to do.

Should I run away? But being caught from behind would be the worst scenario. Should I fight? But then what was that about the monster evaporating?

Though it was said that stabbing the core would scatter it into the air, it was undoubtedly a solid existence with firm flesh before stabbing the core.

But what about that? The reality was that everything had been burned away, leaving him utterly unsure of what to do.

Kanna, who was bewildered, and Rendel, who was mentally confronting her, faced off for a while. And unable to endure it any longer, Rendel, thinking that fleeing would be a useless d*ath, charged first.

“Uaaaaaaah!”

It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that fear engulfed her. Kanna was also startled by the monster charging at her with a sudden battle cry.

But Kanna perceived that she had regained some strength, evidenced by her healed body, and readied her stance.

“Haah—”

Even if she was last place, she hadn’t been completely useless until now.

Given the circumstances, it was a subject she had briefly deleted from her studies at the academy. Sometimes, learning interpersonal skills in case there were situations where police would need to handle violent protests had flitted through Kanna’s mind.

Kanna hadn’t forgotten those training moments shared with Yoon Hamin and Orca. Her body remembered those vividly and began to move on its own.

Grabbing the monster’s fist that came flying, Kanna spun her body sharply backward. Kanna’s body turned 180 degrees, and she closely pressed up against the monster, delivering a kick to one of its hooves that she had been holding.

In an instant, Rendel, who lost his balance, was thrown onto Kanna’s backside.

The sensation of floating was conveyed through Rendel’s body, who held his breath. Moments later, Kanna’s body slammed him into the ground.

“Cough…!”

Rendel, mercilessly embedded in the floor, had no choice but to fall under Kanna’s fierce strength.

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Kanna took the upper position over Rendel, who was lying on the floor. After sitting down with her belly against the ground, she slammed her fists into Rendel's stomach.

"Ugh…! Come out, come out…!"

Rendel groaned in pain and reached out with his hand. He believed that with the strength of a monster, even the strongest person could be pulled out from above.

But Kanna's body, which was gradually adapting to the unrefined magical power, was moving further away from being human. It was not strange to say she resembled a monster.

Even though Rendel was gripping Kanna's left arm, he couldn't pull it sharply. He wanted to pull, but Kanna's shape was as immovable as solid stone, which widened Rendel's eyes.

Unbeknownst to Kanna, her body was awakening to magical power. Her body, which had been broken and rebuilt many times, had become something that could no longer be seen as human.

As Kanna trembled in agony and cried tears from the pain, her body was getting closer to that of a monster.

Kanna's body, which had unknowingly accumulated unrefined magical power, triggered her abilities to escape from danger and simultaneously manifested a strong power resembling that of a monster.

Who would know that there was someone who could pound a monster and win one-on-one? If someone who didn’t know the circumstances saw this, they would definitely be horrified.

“Ugh, ugh…!”

“Spit it out, spit it out.”

Rendel, suffering, cried tears while keeping his mouth shut. Though it didn’t seem like he had any intention of killing himself, he was afraid of unintentionally unleashing his abilities because Kanna continued to attack his abdomen.

Desperately trying to hold back, Kanna was unfazed by any of it.

Because Yoon Hamin might be in danger, and because it was something that needed to be done, she clenched her fists.

Kanna, who had always lost, had won. The magical power was on her side.

Imagining the intense heat required to melt an entire monster without a single spark was almost beyond comprehension. The punches, which Rendel found difficult to withstand, soon left bruises on his body.

As he was hit again and again, the pain only grew stronger.

“I will never… spit it out…”

Would it be better to d*e instead? If she suddenly unleashed her powers here, and because of that fell out of Reika’s favor, the idea of hunting monsters to satisfy her meals would definitely vanish.

Then her family would be in danger as well, so that couldn’t happen.

Feeling a sensation as if being pushed toward a cliff, Rendel became even more desperate.

Seeing Rendel like that made Kanna feel pity.

Kanna was numb. She was becoming dull.

Like endorphins reducing pain, her emotions had dulled. She merely thought “it is what it is” when she saw Rendel suffering. Even though she was hitting someone like this, it was just “it is what it is.”

It was a situation that indicated something was wrong, but no one was there to stop it.

Other large monsters that had been following along seemed to avoid Kanna slightly as the monster kept dissipating. Although it wasn’t a monster with red eyes, it seemed that even the beasts instinctively knew fear.

“Ah, ugh…”

“Spit it out.”

“Okay, okay, I got it…”

Under Kanna’s urging, Rendel had no choice but to shout surrender.

He was afraid of Reika, but Kanna, who kept hitting him without trying to k*ll him, also looked like a crazy person, filling him with a desire to escape.

If his abdomen got damaged, it was evident that not only his body but also his abilities would break down, so he took a step back.

He thought Reika would be compelled to look the other way if it were like this.

“Okay, okay… is that enough?”

For a moment, Rendel seemed to gag, then he spat out a yellow orb from inside.

It felt slightly contrasting to the purple orb totem created by Reika.

Rendel gripped it, crushed it, and in that instant, the orb crumbled and its particles shot off somewhere like a streak.

Kanna observed it closely, then slowly stopped her fists and looked at Rendel.

“…Why?”

To Rendel, Kanna had now become an object of fear.

He thought he couldn’t do it with strength and could not side with a monster, and that realization created an unavoidable fear.

Since Kanna herself didn’t know how that power came about, she merely stood up slightly and looked down at Rendel.

“…Go. Go back and don’t come back.”

“Ugh…”

Upon hearing those words, Rendel had no choice but to flee.

He thought of helping with whatever Reika was doing on the other side, but seeing Yoon Hamin happily having a one-on-one made him want to stay away from there, and just then he found himself trapped and needed to escape. He never imagined there would be a human who could overwhelm him one-on-one, which made Rendel even more scared as he ran back to where Reika was.

Kanna clenched her slightly numbed fists. Thanks to being wrapped in bandages, it didn’t hurt that much.

She had to follow him. Since he was bound to Reika, it could also mean she was preparing to return in a 2-to-1 fight now that Yoon Hamin’s strength had been restored.

She needed to follow.

Follow.

With that thought in mind, Kanna dragged her slippers along, but strength was gradually leaving her legs. The sunlight that had been shining on her

was sinking lower, and the moment the world plunged into darkness, Kanna’s body fell to the floor.

Powerlessly collapsing onto the ground, Kanna stared blankly at where her gaze landed.

The heroes were increasingly surrounding the monsters and trying to capture them, and Kanna felt that this situation was becoming dangerous.

But what could she do now? Even if it was dangerous, her body wouldn’t move anymore.

It felt like all the events from earlier had been a lie; her whole body was aching to the point of unbearable. There was a warmth rising over her body, yet it wasn’t a burn.

Now, it seemed too late for any penalties to take effect, but no matter how much she grumbled, Kanna’s body did not rise again.

The dark night descended, and in the world, the starlight began to shine to illuminate the darkness. Underneath it, Kanna quietly looked up at the sky.

Would she be free if she went beyond the barrier? If she were too free, wouldn’t she become a monster? This place was far too scary and taxing, so it might be better to leave.

Countless thoughts crossed her mind, yet Kanna still couldn’t make a decision.

She clenched her throbbing hands and curled her body up.

*

The movement of the monsters slowed down. It even seemed like she could hear voices of people from behind.

Realizing that enough time had passed for heroes to gather before the sun set, she clicked her tongue.

Was there still a monster that wanted to punch her? A monster stretching its fists was annoying, making her turn her head.

Time was growing tighter, and she had to head back to Kanna’s location—

And at that moment, a tingling sensation arrived at her fingertips. This feeling conveyed from her fingertips was welcoming. It felt strangely unfamiliar since it had been a while.

“…What is it?”

Why did it come back without even killing that guy called Rendel or attacking his vulnerable abdomen? Speaking of which, where was that guy called Rendel?

Boom!

Under the darkened sky, starlight suddenly illuminated her. The connections of the stars surrounding her focused on her like a spotlight.

Fighting like this at night gave her good visibility. Other heroes might look at her strangely, but she reminded herself that it couldn’t be helped due to the nature of her abilities and turned her body.

She kicked backward, aiming her leg at the monster. With the added spin, an explosion erupted at the end of her extended leg.

“Ugh?!”

The monster that had rushed in, thinking that the attacks from the stars could be deflected, suddenly sensed something different and widened the distance, appearing to gauge her.

“What are you doing, not coming in?”

Emboldened by the return of her abilities, she infused her sword with strength and waited.

“…Rendel.”

The monster named Reika gritted its teeth and turned its head.

She knew that Rendel was the one sealing her abilities, but had he been caught by another hero elsewhere?

For now, her objective was to defeat the annoying enemy right in front of her, now that her abilities had returned.

“Don’t come any closer to Kanna.”

“What…?”

Could she k*ll him now? No, the attention of heroes rushing from all around had already shifted to one place. Even if she could k*ll him, escaping from the gaze of others was the priority. Getting away with Kanna was the immediate goal.

Having regained the strength to protect Kanna amidst this chaos, she established her first objective. There was no need to be greedy; she could just set a second goal.

She needed to be cautious as the monster Habar might join in, so she aimed her sword carefully. She thought of attacking once and then escaping.

“Who do you think you are to give orders…!”

Veins stood out on his neck. It was a voice that poured out his boiling emotions.

As long as he stood here, leaving the dying people behind, Kanna was the only one connected to the monsters.

Other people besides Kanna were of no concern.

So even if she couldn’t k*ll the monster, when it returned, she had to prevent it from seeking out Kanna or preparing for revenge.

She had to show it that if it threatened Kanna again, it would be in for a bad time.

And in response to that determination, the stars obliged.

The stars that rose in the black sky were vividly visible. The stars began to blink as if they were scattering bullets from a machine g*n.

Before long, they transformed into spears of light and flew toward the monster. They shattered the solidified forearm and pierced through part of its body.

“Consider yourself lucky.”

Nevertheless, she had no time to finish it, so she ultimately turned her feet around.

The other heroes would take care of the cleanup. If they couldn’t finish it, it couldn’t be helped.

That’s just how it is when you’re being chased.

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As time passed, the chaotic situation began to settle down to some extent. The manpower that had been concentrated in one place was dispersed, and they soon began to position themselves to block the monsters coming through the collapsed barrier.

In that space, I ran through the darkness, completely extinguishing my ability to avoid the heroes' gaze.

In the dark, a light like a spotlight occasionally illuminated someone, flickering and fading, making it seem that even the heroes could not easily find my presence.

My ability had returned, but there was no dramatic change.

The biggest issue was that I could not easily k*ll the monster that turned its back on the barrier from which unrefined magical power was flowing.

While this side was just an ordinary space without any home ground advantage, the monster, connected to the outside of the barrier, gained strength simply from the supply of unrefined magical power, and even recovered its stamina, which made things troublesome.

At this rate, capturing the monster might be impossible.

No, I had been able to k*ll that regenerating monster before, so it wasn't entirely impossible.

But…

“Does this mean I shouldn’t be satisfied with my current power?”

On the way back to where Kanna was, I looked up at the sky.

As I took in the stars shining against the black sky, the stars shimmered in response.

It was a return of power, not an increase in strength.

It still meant that I was weak, and the fact that what was possible in this situation was merely a power that could only be compared to the heroes made me anxious.

Getting stronger would have to wait for later.

I had put out the most urgent fire, so I had to go back somehow.

Should I prioritize entering between the buildings?

Still, it would be better to run along the edges of the buildings to see who was approaching.

Then a straight line towards where Kanna was—

…that would have been the case.

“U-uh…?”

While running, I noticed someone collapsed.

No matter how dark it was, it didn’t mean colors were invisible.

Ivory hair that seemed to be hidden in the darkness yet stood out clearly.

My heart raced at the sight of Kanna, curled up like a shrimp beside the building.

I had clearly left her with the suitcase between the gaps in the building. How did she end up here?

“Kanna, Kanna… wake up.”

People would soon be rescued by the heroes.

But I couldn’t save Kanna again, again.

Why are you here?

How did you get here?

With such thoughts creeping into my mind unknowingly, I turned my head. Kanna opened her eyes wide at the sight of the slippers she was wearing.

“Ah.”

The foot that had been struck with the hammer was crushed. It had swelled so much that it looked more appropriate to say she had forced it into the slippers rather than wearing them.

But right now, the foot was not like that.

As if all that swelling had been a lie, the bandaged foot displayed a smooth surface.

In fact, it seemed the swelling had decreased enough that the bandage was slightly loose.

Showing through the bandages was a clean foot with no wounds.

I had seen it before.

I remembered that Kanna’s body, receiving unrefined magical power, would heal itself indiscriminately.

“First, first take a breath…”

I placed a hand on her neck, and I could feel her pulse beating well.

Seeing that she was breathing normally, it didn’t seem like she had been attacked by a monster.

Then why was she collapsed here?

Was there nothing injured?

“Kanna, wake up…”

I gently shook Kanna.

I hoped this would wake her, but it seemed it would take quite some time for her to regain consciousness.

As the heroes began to surround the area gradually, preparing to confront the fleeing monsters and engage in battle, it was clear that if I didn’t escape from this situation quickly, I would be spotted.

The ordinary people had already evacuated, so if I wanted to hide among the civilians, it would be the right choice to do so.

I drew in a bitter sigh.

Then I picked up the still-unconscious Kanna and left the area.

Let’s grab the suitcase and head back.

Having achieved the first goal, I should set the next target and move.

Feeling Kanna’s weak heartbeat transmitted to me, I slowly moved my steps.

*

The night wore on.

But the heroes could not sleep.

In this crisis, there were people who could not get proper rest, families who had lost loved ones crying out in despair, and others facing imminent d*ath screaming in fear, so how could they rest peacefully?

They turned on a massive searchlight, quickly illuminating the areas where enemies were located.

Monsters appeared, and in some places, the monsters were spotted.

They moved swiftly to stop the monsters that were attacking people, and to drive away the monsters responsible for such turmoil.

“First, stop the monsters destroying the buildings!”

The person giving orders scanned the situation with both eyes and quickly devised a plan.

He was a seasoned hero, a veteran known for his ability to read situations at a glance.

“Maximize the personnel to stop the monsters, while those following me focus on sealing the barrier!”

It was a situation that could be seen as reckless, but the area where the barrier had collapsed was relatively narrow.

While it was wide enough for a monster or two to pass through, it was just enough space for one or two monsters to enter.

With this, it would be simpler to deal with the monsters that had already entered than it would have been to handle the collapse.

Finished with the distribution of personnel, the hero turned his head.

He had received reports of a monster’s presence, but to actually have a monster here was surprising.

While he said he would block the barrier, with the monster glaring at him fiercely, could it really be done?

Even though he was at the forefront and had command authority, doubts lingered on whether it was truly possible.

Previously, they had completely enveloped it with twenty people yet had lost consciousness due to a magical explosion.

Would thirty, thirty be enough?

If so, could they k*ll it all at once?

As various calculations circulated in his mind, Reika, who had been staggered by an attack from Yoon Hamin, gritted her teeth.

She couldn’t contain her frustration.

She had thought about having a little fun this time, but that excitement was shattered.

No, in fact, that didn’t matter. The annoyance was directed at Rendel, who had suddenly released his ability, assisting her.

Being someone who had devoured abilities, why was his ability suddenly returning?

Because of that, she found herself forced to endure an unexpected attack.

Due to her inability to gauge the situation, she found herself directly receiving the impact.

Her body throbbed.

And the intent directed towards her felt completely unwarranted.

In the moment her discomfort became apparent, her leadership abilities as a commander surfaced.

“Not one of these guys, or that guy is of any help…”

Her own kind did not follow her wishes.

They didn’t express outrage where they should be outraged.

It displeased her that they acted as if their goal was merely to hunt and consume monsters.

Is living for survival what life is?

Can living like that really be called living?

If she unleashed her anger at those who have caused this miserable existence, perhaps life would return.

Thus, Reika posed these questions.

And those underlying feelings held slightly different meanings.

Despite putting forth such valid reasons, her anger was directed at those who did not acquiesce to her desire to k*ll.

There was a resentment there questioning why she was correct, yet they didn’t follow her.

Ultimately, regardless of being a monster or human, she despised everyone who did not comply with her intentions and reached out to the monsters that made no sense anyway.

“Devour them all!!”

With a growling voice, the eyes of all the monsters turned a bright red.

A larger totem than before emerged within her grasp.

A cube-shaped totem soon merged into one, then became two.

As it swelled in number, it eventually became a single sword.

A violet sword lighting up the darkness was held by the monster.

The heroes witnessing this cried out in horror.

“The monster wielded a weapon! Everyone, concentrate fire!”

The raised hand swung down.

In that moment, as a signal fell, the heroes gathered to stop the monster combined their strength.

Out of the thirty-plus heroes, twenty had abilities to launch attacks.

Fire, ice, lightning, and any abilities capable of firing or launching gathered in one point.

Gripping that sword, Reika stepped forward, using the unrefined magical power flowing from her back as a cloak.

With a resounding boom, the sword swung and sliced through the air like a baton.

It was not meant to deflect attacks.

It was not even designed to launch shockwaves for interception either.

It was meant to manipulate the monsters and draw them before her.

An elephant-like monster came thundering toward Reika, blocking her path.

Instantly, a cover appeared for Reika.

From the heroes’ perspective, Reika had vanished, creating a bewildering situation.

Furthermore, the fact that twenty people fired together at a single target yet failed to break through resulted in a mix of admiration and curses.

Reika swung the sword, paying no mind to the monster she had summoned who seemed to be in agony from the attack.

“Go, fight!”

The sword was aimed at the humans standing against the wall, the heroes showing hostility towards her.

While monsters came rushing in following the command, one figure approached Reika.

As Reika, on high alert, turned her head sharply, she saw Rendel, who gasped in surprise.

“What is it?”

“Guh, huh… s-sorry… Reika.”

Rendel had said he would run if things got dangerous.

Now he deemed himself unsafe and tried to escape.

The problem lay in the fact that this would need to be accepted as reasonable by Reika too.

“Over there, there’s something overwhelming me… Gah?!”

He tried to explain to Reika to convince her and seek an exit beyond the barrier.

But Reika had no intention of listening to such voices.

Filled with irritation, she grabbed a fistful of Rendel’s hair and pulled him down to the ground, kicking his abdomen.

“Ack…”

With tears in his eyes, Rendel curled up on the floor, holding his belly.

“What? Overwhelming? What nonsense. It’s only been a few hours since you arrived, and you’re already overwhelmed. Do you think you can eat two monsters and be carried away?”

Reika pointed the sword at Rendel, who trembled in fear.

The sword seemed to vibrate with unrefined magical power, glowing ominously, so it wasn’t about to pierce Rendel’s neck.

“Get lost. But you’ll live a life of hardship forever.”

At those words, Rendel’s eyes widened.

“N-no… I’ll fight, I can fight…”

Knowing that sticking by Reika, who could handle monsters, was easier than hunting and eating them all alone, Rendel could only muster the courage to stand up while trembling.

Ch. 141 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 141

The monster went from one to two. Although humanity had previously managed to reduce their numbers from three to two, they still understood how powerful the impact of just one monster could be.

Just as there are different types of humans, there are varying levels of strength among monsters as well.

There are monsters that charge recklessly into battle, leading to their own demise, while others are clever enough to strike and retreat when their time is up.

And then there are those irritating monsters that calculate their movements, even while charging, and have a last resort when they find themselves in a crisis.

Dead monsters were not bothersome. That’s why they could be killed. The surviving monster was bothersome. The inability to k*ll it was proof of that.

The fact that there were two monsters hiding in invisible places was frightening.

Just a moment ago, it had been one, and suddenly someone dashed in from behind the barrier and slipped right into the body of an unseen elephant monster—there could be no more shocking scene than that.

Wasn’t thirty enough to deal with one? That thought was turned upside down in an instant.

It might be possible to handle one, but fighting against two was a daunting task. Exposing weaknesses that could lead to effective attacks could easily be thwarted by the fact that there was a companion.

That reality was unavoidable.

Rendel fidgeted around, glancing nervously at Reika.

He had been hit in the stomach several times by Kanna, making it throb painfully, and a single kick from Reika had left him aching as well.

Since the stomach isn't a particularly active area, it would just throb and sting if he stayed still, and while he could endure it for now, that little pain had become a collar around him.

"Rendel."

"Uh, yeah."

"Go fight. I'll support you against the monster."

"…Oh, okay."

Rendel nodded.

It was the same work as before—killing humans alongside the monsters.

The beings known as monsters were once human. However, they were monsters, and there was no mention of being human.

To those inside the barrier, this was all they saw.

The peaceful daily life of monsters was invisible. No one would inform them or let them know. They didn't acknowledge the existence of those barely surviving outside the barrier, hunting monsters for sustenance.

Before them stood a being intent on trampling the interior of the barrier.

They just had to fight. For the sake of their lives ahead.

They had to follow. For the future they would live.

Everyone lived that way.

Even if they were swept away, it couldn’t be helped.

There were many monsters who died hunting because they wanted to eat meat or needed food. There were also those that, lacking knowledge due to being driven out, ate the wrong mushroom or grass and perished.

Dying from starvation or from eating the wrong thing was utterly disheartening.

In an attempt to escape such a situation, Rendel reached out to Reika. She answered him, and he had to follow that command.

To minimize the necessity of risking their lives in battle, they had to risk their lives in battle.

Rendel hesitated, enduring the throbbing pain, and clenched his fist. Unrefined magical power began to swirl around him, flowing down her hand.

“—Ride it.”

Reika spoke coldly to him.

The monster he aimed at was a black cheetah-shaped being.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m not going far. Just distract their attention and attacks from here. You don’t have any long-range options, do you?”

“Right.”

“Go.”

Rendel jumped, climbing onto the back of the monster that appeared to be around two meters high, and rushed out onto the road between the buildings.

The heroes watching that were astonished and aimed their lights.

“A monster has a monster rider!”

“The speed is incredible. I’ll quickly dispatch heroes to pursue!”

“This area—”

People were shocked by the sight of the monster racing past as if cutting through the wind. When they found themselves dazed at its speed, Reka’s attack pierced through the ensuing chaos.

What was termed an attack was not her sword but rather the chaos caused by the monster she controlled.

Monsters from numerous areas gathered together. Animals that once lived in the forest or jungle had now transformed into monsters, playing recklessly at Reika’s hands.

“Phew.”

With her irritation somewhat eased, she raised her sword. She aimed at none other than the rooftop of a building.

That was where the heroes were positioned to launch their abilities.

“C Team is under attack! We will disengage from our positions!”

A squad formed of four. Every building had its sniper points, but they had to vacate their spots due to monster snipers.

As they quickly fled the buildings, a massive sphere of magical power generated by Reika’s sword turned into a laser, dismantling the rooftop.

When the top level and the roof were blown away, the other squads, seeing that, promptly judged that they would need to escape as well.

“F Team, we will be exiting the building!”

“New reinforcements from H, I, and J Teams have joined. We will secure sniper points immediately.”

Noisy announcements from the radio repeated incessantly. Though they moved under the discretion of appointed leaders, the presence of a commander was a given.

“Disengaged C and F Teams, please stop the monsters’ movements.”

“—C Team, acknowledged.”

“F Team acknowledged as well.”

In the increasingly urgent situation, they were engaged in a tense battle. They hoped to swiftly end the interruption by the monsters intent on collapsing buildings and killing people while quickly refocusing support to this area.

As darkness settled at night, the fight which began around 7 PM, before the sun set, was still going on as it approached midnight.

It was no surprise that either side could face physical problems, yet Reika repeatedly summoned her magical power to stand back up, time after time.

While she had fought with the mindset that she could withdraw when she became fatigued, she was now driven by the thought that she had to achieve some results since she had sent one of her summoned ones to battle and d*e.

Moreover, the hole she created was not for anything other than to k*ll ‘Kanna Aurora.’

A strange-eyed human who could obstruct her path many times ahead.

The one she fought one-on-one earlier had threatened her at the end not to touch Kanna, sparking her rejection even more.

She swore to tear the girl called Kanna apart right in front of that brat, tightening her throat.

Because of this, even the heroes, who were merely humans despite being awakened ones, were growing increasingly weary.

“…This is A Team, C Team has been annihilated. F Team has lost two members. I will incorporate the two into A Team.”

The heroes who had decided to intercept the monsters ultimately became fatigued and died in battle. They did manage to take down quite a number of monsters, but they couldn’t handle the overwhelming numbers pouring in.

“This is E Team, the heroes’ fatigue is too high. We wish to swap out for a moment. If this continues, we risk total loss.”

“E Team, retreat granted.”

“Understood. Thank you.”

There were those dying. It was a scene illustrating what happened when monsters, driven by desperation, fought fiercely.

Ultimately, someone sighed heavily.

“d*mn, how did it come to this?”

Having retreated from E Team and joined K Team, Asrad brushed back his hair and gripped his weapon.

He had originally come to stop the monsters that had broken through the barrier, but he had joined late because it was deemed more urgent here than there.

Before he could grasp the situation, he urgently received a report and bore witness to the scene, resulting in considerable confusion.

But this was how the environment granted to heroes usually was. There were no monsters or beings willing to wait for them to understand.

If understanding was slow, then they had to act immediately. If both were late, only d*ath awaited.

“Mr. Asrad, long time no see.”

The one who greeted Asrad was Sel. Though they were from different teams, they exchanged greetings because they had crossed paths for a moment.

“It’s been a while.”

“That’s the monster from before, but, considering the situation, it’s a bit tough.”

“Haha… I owe you one, so I came to repay it.”

Asrad responded with a bitter smile to Sel’s words, recalling the scene of the monster that had mocked him by imitating the ability he had used.

“Is that so?”

Though Sel couldn’t hide her anxiety, she knew that there was no backing down in this situation, so she too gripped her sword and unleashed blue flames.

“And you?”

“Oh, I’m from I Team. What about you, Asrad?”

“I’m from K Team. Let’s not k*ll each other.”

“Agreed. Like E Team, we should retreat properly at the right time.”

With that said, they both dashed off in the same direction.

[Zone 1 has been secured. The monsters have been dealt with, and it’s just a matter of blocking the barrier. Monsters have not been detected. I will send necessary personnel and replacements to Zone 2. Excluding 18 injured and 5 dead, 67 heroes are expected to join.]

Before long, midnight had passed, and the time was advancing toward 2 AM.

[Zone 2 casualties 25. More reinforcements are requested.]

[The fatigue of the heroes is too high. Reinforcements are needed.]

[We will replenish the personnel that was swapped out earlier. E Team is hoping to return.]

[5 additional casualties have been reported. Total deaths 30. About 7 teams are at the level of annihilation. Immediate reorganization and team restructuring are urgent.]

The messages from the radio continued to drop hope into despair.

There were no victories to report, only voices relaying the casualties.

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Yoon Hamin carried Kanna on his back. Not only that, but he also held a suitcase in his hand.

Since it contained Kanna's clothes and his own, he couldn't just toss it aside. He would have to live a life of fleeing from now on, and he couldn't expect any aid. It was even impossible to go out to earn money.

He had to live off his limited funds, and in a situation where he had to spend without any support and didn't know how long it would take, it didn't make sense to waste anything, so leaving it behind was out of the question.

Kanna's limbs had healed, but now she either seemed to be asleep or unconscious and wouldn't wake up, leaving him with a frustrating feeling that he had to carry her.

However, Yoon Hamin couldn't go too far like that.

The monster kept trying to advance, and the place Yoon Hamin was aiming for was also in that direction, so he had to change his course. Naturally, it made sense that the heroes had to hide and rest repeatedly, as they approached to join their respective agencies.

He kept stumbling.

Time flowed mercilessly, and there was no sign of the situation improving.

All he had to do was save Kanna. Despite thinking, "Do I need to worry about anyone else?" he, too, felt anxious. At least, the monster Reika, which seemed like it would back off quickly, was not retreating easily.

Even as time passed like this, the fight continued.

It was a scene where it felt as if all the monsters in the world were converging, with admiration and horror following in its wake.

Nearby people, needing to save their own lives, rushed out, disregarding buildings and anything else. Yoon Hamin, sitting against an empty building, let out a deep sigh.

He had expected the heroes to quickly capture the monster named Reika or force it to retreat to wrap up the situation, but it was frustrating that they couldn’t muster any strength.

Yoon Hamin, who had never faced a stubborn monster before, was left with such feelings.

Since he was not at the scene right now, it was easy to think lightly about it.

If Yoon Hamin had faced the monster directly, wouldn’t he have thought he was crazy? That was also a possible situation.

Of course, there was no way to know right now, so his gaze turned to Kanna, who he had briefly set down beside him. He gently placed a finger on Kanna’s cheek, which looked like she was sleeping soundly, feeling the soft touch.

“Kanna.”

Was she asleep or unconscious?

Did she try to come to him right after healing? If she encountered the monster on the way, wouldn’t it be like returning to being a child as it was before?

A feeling of unease overcame him.

He thought he had regained some memories and was returning to the original Kanna, but the possibility that she might return to her cheerful self made cold sweat flow as an illusion.

“…Kanna.”

The complacency of thinking she would wake up when the time came was nowhere to be found. Only a sense of urgency remained, awakening Kanna.

And as if that unease was unnecessary, Kanna’s eyes slowly opened.

“…Umm?”

Her voice, close to a mumbled sound as if she had just woken up, eased Yoon Hamin’s tension.

“Kanna.”

He felt relieved to realize that she was not in a state of unconsciousness, but the anxiety of what if Kanna had lost her memory or was mentally challenged stirred up his nerves again.

“Are you awake?”

“…Mm. Hamin.”

Kanna shook her head side to side as if trying to collect her thoughts. Yoon Hamin raised a light above his head to brighten the surroundings so he could see her more clearly.

Kanna’s violet eyes reflected Yoon Hamin, and as he faced her gaze from a close distance, he swallowed hard.

Her tone and atmosphere didn’t seem like how Kanna would appear if she had lost her memories and her mental state was impaired. Feeling relieved once again, Yoon Hamin nodded.

“Yeah, it’s me. I don’t know why, but my strength came back, so I ran away here for now.”

“…Ran away?”

“Yeah, I tried to get as far away as possible since I found you collapsed

midway.”

“Really…?”

Kanna opened her disheveled eyes and slightly raised her head.

Though they were not in a place where it was easy to see because of the buildings around them, the massive figure of the monster that could be seen through the gaps was impossible to hide. Moreover, the rumble that echoed every time the monster stepped on the ground made its presence strongly felt.

Seeing this, Kanna’s eyes widened.

Although she remembered some things, the fact that she had fought and beaten a monster felt unreal and she struggled to accept it.

She seemed a bit confused because she couldn’t comprehend that she had gone on a rampage after receiving too much Unrefined Magical Power.

Undoubtedly, it was a good thing and worth celebrating that Yoon Hamin’s powers had returned, but the discomfort with the process made her hesitate.

Seeing Kanna appear distressed, Yoon Hamin hesitated before carefully asking.

“…Why? Is there a problem?”

“No, it’s not that. What time is it now?”

Kanna recognized that the time frame of the scenery she first saw was different from the current one and quietly murmured.

“Right now, it’s four o’clock.”

“Four o’clock…? Four in the morning?”

“Yeah, yeah. I couldn’t run too far. With heroes constantly moving around, it was pretty limited to avoid them…”

Yoon Hamin felt sorry about not being able to escape far, but Kanna’s interest was not in that aspect.

“Why, why is there still a monster?”

Kanna’s question was something Yoon Hamin was already pondering. However, since Kanna was the priority, he hadn’t addressed it seriously.

After saying that, Kanna staggered and pushed herself up.

Yoon Hamin, who barely supported her wobbling body from the side, held her firmly to prevent her from falling. Kanna leaned against him for support and glanced in the direction where the monsters were gathered, deep in thought.

And at the end of that thought, an answer was drawn.

Reika was angry and seemed determined to end things here. If that wasn’t the case, then she wouldn’t take the time to achieve her goal.

Even though she was predisposed to enjoy killing, she did have a goal, so it was essential to know what that goal was.

“…We have to go.”

“Where?”

“We can’t stop now.”

“We need to run away. No more…”

Yoon Hamin tried to emphasize that they were in a position to escape. But Kanna was resolute.

“There might be a future where everyone dies in this situation.”

Hearing her serious voice, Yoon Hamin ultimately grappled with his feelings.

He wanted to prioritize Kanna, but Kanna hoped that Yoon Hamin would care for everyone.

Realizing this sentiment, Yoon Hamin hesitated for a moment before making a decision.

*

If it was going to end like this, he wouldn’t have chosen to be a hero.

It was more about the joy of being recognized as the chosen one than the sense of duty to protect those who couldn’t become Awakened Ones.

In a world that had been peaceful for a long time, he thought there were no further monster attacks and thus had offered support like this.

It was the moment when the perception of a cushy job, where he just handles simple chores and leaves for the day, was shattered.

I don’t want to d*e.

“Ugh, ahhh!”

The enormous front paw of the monster stomped down on the head of a hero who had dropped his weapon and collapsed. The person crushed beneath, like a cigarette b*tt being stomped on, looked like nothing more than a cigarette b*tt crushed by a monster.

[J-Group has been wiped out.]

A voice rang out from someone watching the situation.

With no sign of it ending, morale steadily declined, and the number of those dying, unable to cope with the approaching monsters, only increased.

Even as it approached four o’clock, Reika was unusually continuing to send monsters in without retreat, and it was incredibly troubling that Rendel was diverting both their gaze and attacks.

“Cough, pant…”

Selah thought she might be somewhat fortunate to have joined late, as she took in the devastated surroundings.

The monsters were emerging just as Reika had continued to gather them all this time.

Moreover, Reika was moving around while hiding herself behind the body of a gigantic monster, and even Rendel riding a Cheetah monster through the village made capturing the monsters seem increasingly unattainable.

Had they been allowing this all along? Was she purposely taking her time gathering monsters to make humans let their guard down?

Such questions arose in the heroes’ minds.

“Is it still a shift, Asrad?”

“Well, not yet. Looking at it, there are more who retreated due to injuries than due to fatigue, so it seems unavoidable.”

“Haa.”

Selah let out a sigh. It occurred to her to write a will, feeling thrown into a situation that seemed hopeless.

Of course, since it was a job where one fights with their life on the line, a will was always prepared, but it was inevitable to feel regret for not writing about recent events as the updates lagged.

“It’s a disaster.”

Selah took a deep breath one more time and charged at the monster.

How had a monster like that hidden its strength until now? Were they merely playing with it? Countless thoughts crossed her mind. But what loomed largest at this moment was simply the desire to go home and enjoy a beer.

Ah, I don’t want to d*e.

The thoughts that the heroes who had died so far had right before their demise. They wished that if this could bring salvation to people, it would be good. Yet, their longing for life could not be denied.

I want to live.

She prayed earnestly.

Even if she had to fight fiercely until her whole body was drenched in sweat, or if she were to get hurt and end up relying on a hospital for a while,

At that moment, looking up at the approaching monsters, she caught a glimpse of the flickering stars beside her. With each flicker, she wondered if that was how a star could shine.

Feeling the sensation of time stretching like taffy right before d*ath, Selah was lost in thought, wondering if she was witnessing a mirage.

Before her mind completely cleared, she faced a massive monster that was enveloped in light in an instant.

Together with Selah, the heroes who were gradually reaching their limits around her found salvation in the starlight.

Like people who had just barely found a flicker of light to rely on in the pitch-black night, they turned their heads.

Even if it were just a small light, they wished to lean on this until daybreak, hoping for it to last.

But contrary to such expectations, Yoon Hamin had no particular desire to respond.

He wanted to become a star just for Kanna. Yet, when he desired to become a star, he could not be a star solely for Kanna. A star that shone only for one person while remaining dark to others could not exist.

The actions he took for Kanna would trickle down to others as a side effect, perhaps.

Yoon Hamin reminded himself once again. Of the being he wished to protect.

Of who he would emit light for.

“—Aldebaran.”

Burn your body. Shine forth.

According to the wish of one who wished for light to shine on everyone, the boy decided to become everyone’s star.

Just for one person.

Ch. 143 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 143

People were afraid of a dark night without a bright sun.

Not knowing when and where the barrier might collapse left them in a situation where they didn’t know what to do, making it only natural to feel fear.

With reports of something collapsing at any moment, they couldn’t know if it would be in their front yard or in the yard of another village, making it impossible to suddenly move inside, and spending money on accommodations day by day was a gamble.

There were issues related to housing prices, lodging fees, and various other reasons that kept people from fleeing, forcing them to live each day braving d*ath.

Do you know the feelings of someone who must risk their life just to survive another day?

Do you understand the emotions of someone living a life where today or tomorrow could be their last?

Since they don’t live there, they believe it doesn’t concern them.

If you don’t have money, you end up living in such places.

They live a pitiful life, dying under cold gazes and indifference, buried in the d*ath list.

Losing friends, losing lovers, losing children, losing parents.

There were people living a life of anguish, screaming in the pain of their losses.

Thus, those people wished for their suffering to end.

But because they couldn’t do it themselves, they had to rely on someone else.

They needed to hope and lean on others.

Typically, they would cheer for the heroes of their agency who protected their area.

And not long after, they found themselves searching for a stronger hero who would come to support them instead of the agency’s hero.

Like those searching for light in the darkness, lifting their heads to gaze at the stars.

Like those who barely manage to shine through their dark lives, drawing comfort from that small light.

The heroes fought for those people, but being human, they too grew weary and could only fall.

It was nearly impossible for them to meet all expectations.

When the barrier first collapsed, the condition of the heroes who participated in the fight was at its peak; they could cut down monsters in a single blow.

However, as time passed—one hour, two hours, three hours—breath became labored, and sweat dripped from their brows.

In the weather of mid-June, not resting while working was a strain, even for seasoned heroes.

The flowing sweat obscured their vision, and hot air compounded their labored breathing, making it difficult for them.

Because of that, the worst-case scenario formed where they knew it was hard but couldn’t flee.

About the time everyone was weary, when fatigue and despair deepened on everyone’s faces, someone revealed themselves in front.

They didn’t look like an academy student.

After all, there were no adults around to keep students here at this hour, so it was odd for someone to be.

Yet, they didn’t look like a hero either.

No, they seemed like a hero, but there was no word of support arriving from anywhere.

They didn’t seem to move like someone following orders.

It was understandable.

That sudden appearance was an independent act and not someone acting on orders.

But Sel knew. As she slumped down, she realized immediately who stood before her.

With black hair flowing, radiating an aura like light, there was only one person in her memory.

Yoon Hamin. The top student of the academy.

That was how she remembered him, but now he was just a school refuser, not a top student.

Still, he stepped forward.

He hadn’t emerged to become a hero or to catch the attention of heroes.

He hadn’t come to wipe the tears of those screaming or alleviate the pain of those suffering.

Yoon Hamin stood there for a reason different from the one he had when he entered the academy three months ago.

“—Aldebaran.”

He spoke the name given to a star.

At that moment, among the waves of stars spread across the sky, the called star responded.

Twinkle.

The massive beam of light that surrounded him defeated the monster in an instant.

While any seasoned hero could have done it, they felt grateful that such a being emerged in this situation.

With many heroes wanting to crumble and rest, having a hero restored to peak condition like this made blocking the attacks much easier.

Yoon Hamin was granted Aldebaran’s power.

Always showcasing versatility that covers both offense and defense, when borrowing the power of a specific star, the ability transformed into a fully specialized skill by giving up one of the aspects.

Receiving strength through the beams of light, Yoon Hamin immediately took his stance.

His feet were ready, and his sword was drawn without a sheath, prepared to swing.

Reika’s eyes widened at that sight.

She clenched her teeth at the realization that Yoon Hamin was ready to charge.

“…d*mn it…!”

She bit down hard.

No matter how strong Reika was, the number of monsters she controlled was limited.

She had unleashed them for nearly nine hours, and the heroes had been receiving the onslaught.

Despite being a monster, Reika was exhausted and her resources were running low.

Seeing Yoon Hamin, who had previously humiliated her, show up in such a situation made her furious.

Annoyed and irritated, she swung her purple sword to eliminate him first.

“k*ll him, k*ll him…!”

Her sweat-dripping arm stretched out.

At the same time, Rendel’s cheetah monster dashed forward.

Although Rendel was equally fatigued, riding the monster allowed him to shift with its movements.

And seizing that gap, Yoon Hamin charged.

Under the thick darkness of the night sky, Yoon Hamin’s body propelled forward, leading with his shoulder.

Accelerated, Yoon Hamin’s sword cleaved through the monster in front of him.

With a crack, the sound of the monster’s core being destroyed echoed, urging the heroes behind to muster their tired, worn-out strength.

For one last time, they aimed to seize victory.

“I don’t know who you are, but for now, I’ll consider you an ally and join you.”

The surviving hero from Group I said.

Sel shook her head upon seeing that hero.

“He’s a student. An academy student…”

“…Is that so? Then please report first. I’ll go help that student right away.”

“…….”

Sel watched those following Yoon Hamin.

Even though she wasn’t certain of who he was, whether a hero or a student, it was impressive to see others following him.

As if burning their own selves to move forward, anchoring everyone’s resolve.

Seeing her mentee go that far, Sel couldn’t just stand idle; she quickly grabbed her sword and rose.

Her staggering footsteps soon solidified into decisive strides.

As Kanna hoped, Sel swung her sword to endure this moment.

With a bang! she cut down a staggering monster.

What Yoon Hamin aimed to do wasn’t to capture hybrids but to slice down the root cause, so she tossed the monster aside and charged forward.

Naturally, the responsibility of dealing with the monsters fell to the heroes following Yoon Hamin, who supported him.

“What the hell is he?” they wondered, yet as they pushed back the monsters and rushed toward the foe, they kept reminding themselves that they were on the same team, willingly pouring their remaining strength into handling the monsters.

“Ugh…! This is my tenth monster slain!”

A hero struck his sword down on the monster’s neck.

A hero next to him sighed heavily.

Excluding the weaker heroes, many had already taken down over ten monsters each.

They were tired, exhausted, and likely sleepy too, but seeing Yoon Hamin moving forward boosted morale, motivating them to endure.

Sel gripped her sword tightly, looking at the heroes regaining their strength.

Having participated late, Sel had also ended the lives of thirteen monsters, but it seemed regrettable to d*e here without pushing on.

With a kick against the ground, Sel’s sword glimmered green.

Heroes around Sel were also squeezing out their abilities one last time as they rushed in.

They dealt with the monsters left behind by Yoon Hamin and those scattering around.

Then Asrad shouted beside them.

“Ruder! The foe is weaving between the buildings on the monster’s back; confirm it!”

“Got it…!”

Someone who had witnessed Kanna almost d*e from a broken neck joined to lend their strength.

The search magic Ruder had prepared surrounded the area, and he opened his eyes wide.

“5 o’clock!”

“Got it!”

As more heroes began to join Yoon Hamin in handling the remaining foes, Asrad left with Ruder to assist Rendel, while Sel glanced back for a moment and then shook her head, heading again towards Yoon Hamin.

It seemed reasonable to strike the command post since that was the target.

Her green flames brightened the darkness and seared the monster’s body, preventing its regeneration.

Sel’s sword quickly scorched the monster’s wounds while other heroes dug deeper to shatter the core inside.

A glimmer of hope appeared.

The realization that this situation could end, and perhaps in the future the number of monsters and foes would decrease, energized them.

Therefore, they fought desperately as if squeezing out their last strength.

Even if they were to collapse from exhaustion, it was enough as long as they could move toward the possibility.

Ch. 144 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 144

Quickly, and powerfully.

The one that granted the force to give a reckless charge was none other than Aldebaran.

The resilience of the body had risen slightly for the charge.

Even when Yoon Hamin slammed his body against the monster’s leg with a thud, his body remained intact thanks to that.

It was inconceivable that a person’s body could push back against the massive form of a monster.

However, an aura was emanating around Yoon Hamin’s body, empowered by Aldebaran’s strength.

The technique he recalled due to Kanna’s request to become a star allowed for a massive burst of heat and light to occur around his body, pushing back the monster.

Boom!

As Yoon Hamin pushed back the monster and swung his sword in response, the creature lost its balance and staggered, about to fall.

By the time the monster was regaining its balance, Yoon Hamin swiftly rushed toward Reika, and before the monster could catch on, it fell to the attacks of the heroes following Yoon Hamin.

As he rushed forward, leaving behind the monster being attacked and scattered by projectiles, Reika grew increasingly anxious and gnashed her teeth.

And in the end, she swung her purple sword, summoning the monster that Rendel was riding.

She knew that if her kin were to d*e again, it would diminish her standing.

At the same time, she was also considering escaping.

Though enraged for not being able to k*ll Kanna Aurora, she faced the reality that, despite everything she poured into it, she could not annihilate humanity, so she had no choice but to give up.

“Habar, I need your power…”

Reika first thought of running away.

If it were before, she would have slowly coaxed Habar, but the current Reika did not do that.

Originally, the Reika known to Kanna took her time, manipulating Yoon Hamin in his third year to bring about humanity’s destruction.

But the current Reika did not do that.

From the very start, everything was off-kilter, causing the path of persuading Habar to go awry.

All because of one pesky being that was too annoying to ignore.

If Kanna hadn’t been there, she wouldn’t have had to rush her actions.

No, if she had rather not let Kanna go…

Thinking that one moment of enjoyment ruined everything made Reika feel a tingling sensation in her head.

Nothing went as she wanted, and the rigidity of the situation added to her frustration.

Due to a minor divergence, the path to victory that Reika could have taken was blocked.

If only she had managed to persuade Habar properly, if Habar would only move according to her will, everything would easily fall into place.

Yet, even with that thought, the current Reika was in a situation where she had not persuaded Habar, so escaping took priority.

Her biggest challenge was having to push back Yoon Hamin, who was approaching right in front of her.

If only Kanna, that girl, were not around.

If that girl, who tormented Kanna, were to d*e—

A sword flew through the cracks of her cross thoughts.

Grabbing the sword she received from Orca, she quickly swung from left to right, gaining acceleration and delivering a powerful impact to Reika.

“Cough!”

Reika groaned.

The sword made from a totem barely held up, but it was not originally made to clash or cut anything.

It was more like a remote control to determine the direction of her abilities, so it could only withstand strong impacts a few times at best.

Clang, Yoon Hamin’s sword did not think of falling away from Reika’s sword.

If the sword broke, it could easily decapitate Reika, making it all the more desperate.

“Because of you…!”

Yoon Hamin’s expression twisted.

At that same moment, a crack sounded, and Reika’s sword broke.

At the timing of her sword breaking, Reika drew upon her magical power and shot it like a b*llet toward Yoon Hamin.

In the moment the sword broke, Yoon Hamin exploded several flashes of light behind him to finish it off.

It was meant to blind Reika’s vision with the flickering lights, but her attack was already flying toward Yoon Hamin.

“Tch.”

Yoon Hamin, with a high reaction speed, managed to fend it off, but he was unsettled by the fact that he should not be exposed to the monster’s raw magical power for too long.

He knew he shouldn’t be exposed for long. That was why Yoon Hamin seemed to be growing increasingly anxious.

But Yoon Hamin changed his mind for a moment.

Is there anything to be anxious about? If he just takes it down, the damage would be worth it.

Even if he gets sick from exposure to unrefined magical power, that’s something he could manage with treatment somehow.

If he contributed significantly to taking down the monster, Kanna would have a place to return, and he could return as well, so he calculated that this level of damage was worth it.

Honestly, if he could k*ll the monster and find peace, wouldn’t that naturally mean he wouldn’t have to do such things again in the future?

“d*mn it, I don’t like any of this!”

Reika raged and clenched her fists.

In the darkness, a purple aura surged.

She wondered if swinging her fist would slow it down if blocked with a sword, but it seemed she had hardened her fist with magical power like before, for even though her fist collided, the sound of iron striking iron rang out.

“Ugh!”

Yoon Hamin was pushed back, and with a moment gained, Reika gathered her hands together.

Clapping her hands together, a wave surged around her.

If Reika had another purpose in mind, there could have been restrictions on her actions.

But the current goal Reika held was to drag Rendel and escape outside the barrier.

There was a need to forcefully get outside the barrier.

She had to survive. She had to promise for the next time.

Yoon Hamin and the other heroes chasing from behind staggered under the wave created by the monster Reika had conjured.

Caught in a sensation like being flipped inside out, they seemed at a loss for how to deal with their churning stomachs.

“Ugh…”

“Ugh!”

Odd sounds echoed behind Yoon Hamin.

They were already exhausted from fighting all night.

In such a situation, they could only react sensitively to even the slightest touch, and how much more so to a wave made from unrefined magical power.

Yoon Hamin, frowning, managed to calm his stomach.

Yoon Hamin, not overly burdened, could just barely withstand it, and once he did, it was finally his turn.

He borrowed Aldebaran’s strength and quickly charged forward.

After colliding with Reika, he regained his stance.

“—Polaris.”

He called upon the name of the star once more.

Now that he had reached his destination, it was time to borrow the power of another star, not Aldebaran.

A star that always guards one place while acting as a compass for others.

A bright star that shines and is easily seen by people.

The North Star.

The moment Yoon Hamin called the name of the star, light twinkled once again in the dark sky.

Dawn was approaching rapidly, so he had to finish this quickly.

In the moment he could exert the most powerful strength, in a sure manner.

Though Reika did not know this, she poured all her power into escaping from the incoming hostility and malice.

“d*mn it…”

There were now only a few monsters left under Reika’s control.

There were no monsters to lure Habar or to use Rendel.

The thought of having to collect monsters again once she returned was pitiful, but remembering that she couldn’t do anything if she didn’t escape now, she hurled the cube left in her hand.

It was the new type of monster Reika had created as an experiment before.

Unlike the monsters that modeled after animals, this strange creature seemed to have no head, only a torso and legs.

The monster’s body was maintained around a core, and while the skin besides the core could turn into meat, it would often shatter into pieces in an area lacking unrefined magical power.

However, until the core shattered, it acted as a sturdy armor even in places without unrefined magical power, which is why humanity does not aim their firearms at monsters.

Bullets would never reach the core.

Taking advantage of that perception among people, this new type of monster was created.

Although Kanna had already identified its weakness, even if identified, it could be made more complicated or twisted in such a way that it wouldn’t get completely severed.

With complex lines drawn over its solid epidermis, people were bewildered.

Even if bewildered, they did not refrain from doing what was necessary.

The other heroes marked the monster for Yoon Hamin.

The new type of monster sprang forth at Reika’s call, but its focus turned toward those blocking her, not Yoon Hamin.

Yoon Hamin immediately gripped his sword and prepared to stab.

He worried about being caught up in the explosion of unrefined magical power again but thought that if he feared that, he wouldn’t be able to approach the monster.

Wasn’t there a reason he hadn’t used it until now?

Maybe he needed time to gather strength.

“d*e…!”

Yoon Hamin stopped his thoughts.

The sword wielded with the power of the North Star stretched out like a flash of light, grazing Reika’s neck.

“!!”

A sharp sensation lingered on Reika’s neck.

Though only a drop of bl**d emerged, she felt a threat to her life.

As expected of Yoon Hamin, Reika was unable to easily trigger the explosion of unrefined magical power in such a dire situation.

With no time or leeway given, she ultimately had to rely on the monster, but now all that was left was to conserve and think even more.

Reika saw Rendel approaching.

“……”

Rendel seemed too exhausted to continue fighting.

If that were the case, the task they needed to accomplish to both survive was simple.

Just like Yoon Hamin fought desperately, Reika also desperately pulled out.

The monster she had been holding onto until the end.

Since it was a monster without legs, it was clear that it would only be used once.

Now that her desperation for that one-time-use monster was so great, she had no choice but to make the decision.

“Megalodon.”

Reika summoned the aquatic creature with teeth, which she had never brought out since obtaining it.

Yoon Hamin reflexively twisted his body, but he could only be crushed by the explosive mass originating from Reika.

“Gaaah!”

He thought he had evaded, but the immense bulk brushed past, tearing off Yoon Hamin’s left arm.

Ch. 145 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 145

Everyone was watching.

Thankful that there was someone with good condition running towards the monster, while leaving behind the exhausted people after nine hours of continuous struggle, I followed behind them.

It was physically challenging to follow Yoon Hamin, who was resting after stopping the fight, but they burned with determination, thinking that each of them should take down at least ten monsters.

For humanity.

It didn’t have to be grand, just for family.

And for close friends.

The desire to help someone united them, and they desperately followed behind him.

In the past, people decided on their direction by looking at the stars.

Just as they set their path by the stars.

But that was only for a moment.

As I wondered if the bright light would flash back and forth around Yoon Hamin, who was fighting against the monster, everyone was taken aback by the massive creature erupting from around Reika.

“Evacuate!!”

One of the heroes following Yoon Hamin shouted.

Although it was dark, the overhead lights provided some level of brightness.

They had depended on that light, but a colossal figure blocked it completely.

The enormous body flying through the air seemed to fall slowly, very slowly.

With the light gone, darkness took over and people’s thoughts came to a halt.

Is it falling? Is that happening right now? Such thoughts gripped their ankles.

And Yoon Hamin, who was at the same height rather than above, shone brightly.

Polaris. Empowered by the name of the North Star, when he emitted light, the eyes of those engulfed in darkness captured it.

“Selah!!”

Asrad used his ability to compress air and push Selah away.

Selah’s body floated and was sent outside the landing point of the monster, while Asrad grabbed Ruder, who was with him, and flew to the opposite side.

Though surprised, Selah swallowed her breath and accepted it. She wrapped herself in blue flames and took a step before running further away.

Despite the rapid descent, the massive size of the creature caused an illusion of slow falling.

It was just an illusion, and since the falling speed remained unchanged, fleeing swiftly to a safe zone was the priority.

Everyone seemed to split to the sides as if they were creating a miracle.

At the front of that miracle was Yoon Hamin, who was in a safe position but suffering.

“Ugh…”

Yoon Hamin, unable to let go of his sword, clutched his left arm with his fist and was drenched in cold sweat.

The bleeding was the most pressing issue.

Reika pondered if she should k*ll Yoon Hamin in the midst of this chaos or flee quickly.

But seeing Yoon Hamin shining so brilliantly, she felt it would be impossible to k*ll him and ultimately turned to escape.

“Rendel, let’s go.”

“Uh-huh…”

Rendel, despite being exhausted, wasn’t fatigued in her legs as she hadn’t been running on foot the whole time, so her leg fatigue wasn’t high.

Thus, following Reika’s orders, she got off the cheetah monster and ran through the barrier with Reika.

Reika snapped her fingers and headed outside the barrier.

“Where are you going!!”

Yoon Hamin desperately gripped his sword.

Changing the grip, he aimed the blade at Reika’s back.

Aiming, and throwing.

The star in the night sky, Altair, twinkled.

At that moment, power was granted to the sword Yoon Hamin was holding.

As the cheetah-like monster rushed toward Yoon Hamin, he didn’t flinch and threw his sword at Reika’s back.

The sword sped through the air like a raptor hunting its prey.

Thud! As the sword flew faster, it struck Reika’s body, which was far away.

“Ugh! You, d*mn…!”

Reika, pierced slightly on the right side of her back, tasted bl**d in her mouth.

There was a small explosion, yet she withstood it, and the sight shocked Yoon Hamin.

Had she been an ordinary human, she would have collapsed from the pain; however, driven by the conviction to survive, Reika endured the agony with the monster’s body.

Yoon Hamin sighed upon witnessing her absurd resilience.

He tried to move forward but was blocked by the last monster baring its teeth.

The fast cheetah-like monster that Rendel had been riding on.

The fortunate thing was that, despite its speed, it was a relatively weak beast among carnivores.

The unfortunate part was that it was moving to buy time.

“Get lost…!”

Yoon Hamin, struggling, found that the weapon at his waist was gone.

His balance was off due to his left arm being severed, causing his body to sway.

The monster’s teeth snapped at the air.

Had he had his arm, he might have been bitten, but without it, he escaped being caught.

Whether to call that fortunate or not, he thought he had bought himself a turn to act.

With no weapon to push against the monster, he had no choice but to use his ability against it, and the sufficiently exhausted beast died without any great effort.

But in that fleeting moment, the monster concealed itself beyond the barrier, disappearing from sight.

He could handle the monsters, but he only dealt with them without eliminating the root cause.

That truth hit hard.

Some bleeding had been staunched, but bl**d dripped continuously.

If only there had been a severed arm, he could have desperately looked for the Awakened One of the healing type but, having already been consumed, only emptiness remained.

Gripping the severed end with his right hand, he realized his arm would never return.

Yoon Hamin, sitting vacant in place, let out a hollow laugh.

There was no sense of achievement in having blocked such a volume of threats.

He had diminished the monster’s strength, yet he hadn’t erased the source.

The thought that such an event would repeat in the future brought despair.

He couldn’t gauge how many more times he would have to sharpen his sword.

Thinking of how many more monsters, stronger monsters might come was terrifying.

“…What should I do…”

Yoon Hamin, trembling, muttered as he turned his head.

Feeling the wind blowing from outside the barrier, he looked back and saw people gathering to handle the immense body of the megalodon that the monster had expelled.

They appeared to be trying to do what they could now that they realized the monster had already escaped.

“……”

Everything felt regretful.

If he had been a little stronger, could he have killed the monster?

How much stronger did he need to be?

Is it a sin that I didn’t work hard enough to the point of losing my life?

What would remain if he went back like this?

Fighting hard yet having to return without proper outcomes felt too harsh for Yoon Hamin.

He had tried to reclaim the place to assert his and Kanna’s innocence by defeating the monster but was frustrated that it hadn’t gone as planned.

What about Kanna?

Now that everything had been exposed, how could she escape?

Kanna, I’m sorry.

I wanted to create a place for you.

I wanted to create an environment where you could smile.

But it all felt meaningless, whether having ranked last in the Academy or fighting while shedding bl**d, and he was in great pain.

Is this what you felt back then, Kanna?

Was it the sense of powerlessness that nothing could be done despite your efforts?

I’m sorry.

Yoon Hamin blamed himself and suffered once more.

It felt as if tears were swelling from his helplessness, and he barely swallowed a breath.

Then, with his vision hazing, he closed his eyes and collapsed.

Ch. 146 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 146

The sun rose.

I had dealt with all the monsters, but in return, there had to be countless sacrifices. I had power, but soon I had to wait for Yoon Hamin while watching from behind, yet I was waiting because I trusted him.

I could not be noticed. If I attracted attention and was dragged elsewhere, it would be disastrous, so there was nothing I could do.

I watched quietly from a distance, hoping for good news, hiding among the remaining buildings.

However, there was no good news. The number of people dying, compared to the news of driving away the monsters. Even excluding that, I could not hear anything good about Yoon Hamin.

The hero with blue hair and blue eyes. Sel, who is also Yoon Hamin's mentor, seemed to be vigorously defending him.

It was not so close that I could hear their voices, but Yoon Hamin, who had shone with light until before nightfall, still had not returned. It seemed like he was collapsed far away.

As the ambulance carried people, it seemed that Yoon Hamin was mixed in over there.

Yoon Hamin had fought there ahead, and there was blue hair nearby, so it must be Sel? But what should I do now?

I had intended to deal with Reika while Habar was not here, but it seemed things were going wrong.

The current Reika could not have persuaded Habar. Therefore, I had to k*ll Reika this time, and only after killing her would all the crises from the original story disappear, but everything became tangled as if to say the world cannot resolve itself so easily.

I should have killed her, but I had given Reika time to persuade Habar. Since I couldn’t k*ll her, it had become dangerous for Yoon Hamin to reveal himself like this.

Danger…

No, it was not danger. Yoon Hamin actually suited being in such a place better, and if all went well, he could return.

He could return to the Academy. He could make friends again and live with someone he liked.

I clutched my carrier.

I cautiously stepped back.

With Yoon Hamin not returning, it meant he was seriously injured. Even if he was explaining something, it couldn’t take more than a day.

Now that the sun had risen, should I wait a little longer? If he doesn’t return, should I just take this carrier and go back?

It was frustrating not knowing how much he was hurt, but what could I do? It wasn’t that I didn’t want to go; it was just that the situation wouldn’t allow me to.

Grrr.

I was startled by the small growl of my stomach. Unknowingly placing my hand on my belly, heat and hunger approached me simultaneously.

As I sat blankly on top of my carrier, the heroes around me began returning to clean up.

I felt admiration for their will to look around despite being tired from fighting, but sensing the approaching footsteps, I pulled my carrier and moved away.

I kept walking until the sun was high in the sky. This time, perhaps because my hands and feet were better, I didn’t crumble in the middle, but fatigue was unavoidable.

“…Ugh.”

How long had it been?

After walking for a long time, I arrived home.

“Whoa, look at all the dust.”

After three months away, my house was covered in dust, as if complaining about my absence. I opened the window as soon as I entered and started cleaning, leaving the carrier outside the door for a moment.

I swept away the dust with a broom, and finally finished mopping to clean the floor neatly. Glancing at the bathroom, I couldn’t help but smile ruefully, wondering if this was my reality.

Having spent more time at Yoon Hamin’s house than this one, I felt strangely uncomfortable here. It was as if I wanted to deny the fact that I lived in a place like this.

But this was the only place I could return to now.

It felt a bit odd to go to Yoon Hamin’s house and take a spot when he wasn’t there, and given that the association’s staff had come to Yoon Hamin’s house before, I wanted to avoid that risk.

I tried to sort out just my clothes that were taking up half the carrier.

“By the way, where did I leave my carrier? Ah.”

I had left it at Yoon Hamin’s house.

With no assets to speak of, having even that at Yoon Hamin’s house made me feel bleak.

Thinking of Yoon Hamin being at the hospital, it felt so cold once I came home like this. The surroundings felt chilly.

It felt like nothing was in this place.

I pondered what I should do, but indeed there was nothing I could do. I even considered that it would be good to just leave far away.

Where would I go if I left?

If I was going to leave, it wouldn’t make sense other than to find another collapse site out there, ending in a hollow smile.

Turning on the device was risky, so I would rather hope that Orca would contact Yoon Hamin separately.

“—This is.”

I cautiously took out a notebook from Yoon Hamin’s carrier. I remembered. There was no way I could forget the notebook I had brought to write something down when I had no memory.

I had brought it to write a farewell note, but I wondered if Yoon Hamin was wary of that.

As I opened it, my handwriting was terrible. I was surprised at myself for managing to write with such fingers.

Leaving the trivial emotions behind, I quietly ripped out the front page of the notebook. The page containing the incomprehensible handwriting, made illegible by my painful fingers, was crumpled and thrown into the trash.

The number of usable pages had decreased, but there were still plenty left. I held onto it and quietly gripped the pen.

This was the right time to write properly, my intuition shouted.

“…But what should I write?”

However, when I actually tried to write, I was at a loss about the content.

Previously, I had intended to include content about monsters or beasts, but now I found myself in a situation where I knew nothing.

It was unprecedented that Reika had possessed such a gigantic monster. Not even birds flying in the sky or beasts roaming the land, but marine animals.

Speculating and writing about things I didn’t know might be poisonous. Then should I just write about Habar and end it there?

Habar was the type to feel annoyed, and it took a long time for Reika to persuade him. He would even refuse if he didn’t like the monster or didn’t particularly need monster meat.

So there was still plenty of time for that.

As my hands didn’t hurt, the writing flowed easily.

However, it seemed I struggled to write the way I intended, as if it was a farewell letter. I wanted to d*e, but I couldn’t; now that I seemed to be regaining some strength, the desire to avoid d*ath increased, leading to a state where that feeling had disappeared.

Then it should be closer to a letter than a farewell note.

Yoon Hamin. Thank you for three months. Thank you for lifting me up when I was whining about the situation not being good.

Did I endure well despite the pain? Did I hold back my tears well?

The scars from those wounds have now become scars, I wonder if that’s okay.

You will meet wonderful seniors until the third year, and you will expand your network with good juniors. Since we defeated this many monsters, the grace period will probably be long.

I think it would be good to show a good appearance to Teacher Lucia and get along well with Orca.

I have yet to see the beautiful scenery I long to see, but I’m satisfied. Reika seems to have made a wrong choice compared to the future I know, and Yoon Hamin has grown stronger than the future I knew.

It may not be unique, but there are still over two years left, so he can grow in that time.

Get along with the respected teacher and friends. You, who have stuck around and watched over me, should know. The gaze given to a lonely person is so cold.

So, I hope you don’t hold too much regret for me.

Thank you. For saying you would protect me. But I, I don’t want to be a burden anymore. I’ve caused a lot of trouble until now, but still.

Just because you understand doesn’t mean you can continue doing wrong.

Live happily. Happily.

I hope you smile. I’m planning to leave like this.

Live laughing with the person you like.

“…Ugh.”

Contrary to the plain words I was writing, my emotions were rising. The tears quickly came and wet the paper.

The grip on the pen tightened, and the final period I had written without meaning stood out more than anything else.

A period filled with emotion. The tears blurred it.

“Ugh…”

I don’t want to be far away. I want to stay.

I can’t live alone.

With a surge of emotions, I tightly closed my eyes and put down the pen. I gently pushed the notebook aside to avoid damaging the paper.

I’m sorry.

I’m sorry.

It’s my fault.

I had no intention of taking Orca’s place. I already knew, but I wanted to look away.

This might be a story they don’t know, but knowing the future, I couldn’t shake off the guilt.

I had approached with a light heart, thinking that a man would be easier, but who would have known it would turn out like this? Now I felt nothing but remorse.

The fact that Yoon Hamin couldn’t push me away was all for my sake. He valued me more than what he might lose.

Is it really right to give a letter here and run far away? Would it not hurt Yoon Hamin?

He worked so hard, he listened to me enough to go to the hospital; would he feel betrayed if I suddenly disappeared?

That voice which had believed in me, even without any evidence, echoed in my mind. I didn’t want to betray that voice.

So I tore up the paper that had been filled with emotions once more.

Ch. 147 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 147

I needed time to gather my emotions. If I kept this up, I felt I would be too exhausted, so I spread a blanket on the floor and lay down.

Although it was a hot day, the inside of the house was cool, and the blanket itself felt refreshing, which made me feel good. It was cozy, cool, and the weight of the heavy blanket pressed down gently on me.

Having stayed up all night, I felt tired, and my eyes fluttered shut briefly.

Maybe I should sleep a little. Just for a bit.

“Ugh.”

I couldn’t remember the exact moment I fell asleep, but I felt assured that I had slept well enough to slightly mess up my hair when I regained consciousness.

Moreover, it was dark around me, so I couldn’t see anything.

“What time is it…”

I turned my head to seek out a clock with a hazy mind. An old alarm clock in the corner was telling me the time, even without a device.

It was already 1 AM the next day. I thought I must have been really exhausted, but the realization that I was alone made my body shudder.

I thought I would be alright, but being alone in the darkness was unsettling beyond adaptability.

I turned on the light with a shiver and huddled in a corner. I started to fear that I might not be able to live without any light.

Did I really plan to live alone like this? No, if the main culprit were gone, this trauma would soon disappear.

I pulled the blanket over my knees tightly.

Where could Yoon Hamin be? Nearby hospital? Or perhaps a better hospital? I didn’t know well, but it was clear that it wasn’t somewhere I could just go.

Even if I knew the location, trying to find it would be a suicidal act. Asking for directions wasn’t an option either.

Yoon Hamin’s device must be off by now, and if I turned on my device saying I would contact him, it would only lead to a troublesome situation if he tried to track me down.

So, what should I do? Clearly, I couldn’t live like this; maybe I should have escaped instead.

I felt worried that I might be burdening Yoon Hamin with something he couldn’t handle.

Since I was in my house, even if Yoon Hamin returned home, I wouldn’t know. I thought maybe I should go looking for him once, but the thought of acting rashly made me anxious.

“Do I have a hat?”

I rummaged through my suitcase. I didn’t find my hat, but I found Hamin’s.

I took the white hat and tried it on, adjusting it just a little bit more. Wearing the hat perfectly fitted to my head, I entered the bathroom and glanced at the mirror, where my somewhat noticeable appearance reflected back at me.

With my ivory hair and the white hat, I felt it would be hard to go unnoticed.

“Hmm.”

I thought it wouldn’t matter if I went out now, so I took off the hat again.

It was after 1 AM, and even if I went to Yoon Hamin’s house, I didn’t feel like he would be there. After all that hard fighting, there couldn’t possibly be wounds that would allow him to be discharged from the hospital within a day.

It might not even be a hospital. The thought that Yoon Hamin might be at a place where they could compel him to reveal my location made me uneasy.

No, but he wouldn’t treat Yoon Hamin like that after fighting so hard, right?

Since I couldn’t be certain of anything, my frustration only grew.

Grrr.

My stomach cried out, obliviously hungry again. After starving and sleeping repeatedly, feeling hungry was expected.

There was some money Hamin had put in the suitcase, but should I use that to buy food? If I said I would pay him back later, wouldn’t he be lenient?

I at least knew it was okay to use it. I also knew Hamin wouldn’t get mad if I said I was too hungry to hold off.

I wanted to lean on that fact.

I came here after d*ath. Since coming here, I had lived a life entirely negated.

The history I had known was denied, and the way I had lived was denied. The very fact that I had supported heroes without even knowing the history, and that I ended up in last place, made my existence feel invalidated.

Within that, the voice and expression that affirmed my existence helped me endure. I didn’t even need to wish for d*ath.

How many times had I made Hamin suffer? Remembering the time he asked to be killed because he was scared of s*icide made me feel guilty.

How should I apologize?

I clutched the white hat I had removed tightly.

Even the act of reaching out was impossible; what kind of apology was there? I forced a self-deprecating smile. I felt like the reflection of myself in the mirror was mocking me.

Then, at the end, I remembered one last friend. Orca Lamiris. If she were around, wouldn't she help me find where Yoon Hamin was?

*

Hospitals were everywhere. The levels varied depending on how well-equipped they were and how capable the doctors were.

Yoon Hamin was promptly transferred to a hospital affiliated with the Hero Association. Since it was a hospital with a lot of treatment-oriented Awakened Ones, he received priority there.

Originally, the Hero Association intended to keep Yoon Hamin and Kanna for questioning, but since he had successfully helped the heroes defeat the monster at the end, they had no choice but to grant him special privilege.

No politician was unaware that suddenly detaining Yoon Hamin, who had performed so well in front of so many eyes, would draw resentment.

"Is there no sign of the patient's severed arm?"

"Yes, it appears to have been swallowed by the mouth of a gigantic monster."

Yoon Hamin's severed left arm. If he had at least some of it left, it could have been reattached somehow, but with humanity's technology, regenerating a lost arm was an impossible task, leaving only suffocating frustration.

Regardless of the frustration, what could be done? If it was gone, it was necessary to cope as best as possible.

The doctors seemed to be discussing documents briefly but soon turned their attention back to other patients.

There were heroes on the operating table. There were heroes who had lost consciousness. Some heroes had to watch the situation, while others had to prepare for funerals.

Regular people weren’t spared either. In fact, there were even more of them.

Sel glanced at Yoon Hamin with weary eyes. She felt a lingering pity for him, who couldn’t move from the massive shock.

Although she didn’t know what had happened, it was pitiful to see someone rush to fight without the academy uniform.

“Yoon Hamin!”

Then there was a voice that woke Sel from her thoughts.

Lucia, the first-year A class teacher from the academy.

“…Shh. This is a hospital.”

“Oh, I’m sorry…”

Sel put her finger to her lips, and Lucia lowered her head, seemingly embarrassed as she looked toward the other patients.

Then she approached Yoon Hamin again and sighed.

“I guess you’re the homeroom teacher.”

“…Yes. But I don’t think I deserve the title right now.”

Lucia said that self-deprecatingly. Sel tilted her head at those words.

“Did you quit?”

“Oh, no! That’s not it. It’s just that Yoon Hamin hasn’t been coming to the academy, and how should I put it… He has had a lot of issues with Kanna…”

She knew that much. Previously, she had tried to ask Reg, the head of her agency, to get a Totem for Kanna.

But she was completely unaware of what happened afterward. She had no way of knowing what had transpired and what kind of life he was living.

Though they were supposed to be mentor and mentee, the relationship expanded only through practical experiences, so it was understandable that they didn’t have any personal contact.

“Is he not coming to the academy? But he’s the top student, right?”

“He was, but not anymore.”

“…Why not? He’s so strong.”

“He seems to have sabotaged his own exam. He must have had a lot of complaints.”

“Complaints… Would there have been any with such versatility?”

Sel gazed at Yoon Hamin, who was lying still, remembering the events of the previous night. The moments that lasted from dinner until dawn.

“When all the heroes were exhausted from fighting, he came to help at the very end. If it hadn’t been for him, everyone might have died.”

A monster that seemed to belong to the ocean brought in at the end, and the villains who managed to escape d*ath might have all been exhaled.

“In that situation, we were running out of strength to fight back, but having Yoon Hamin there was a blessing.”

“I see… well, he must have had some complaints. Kanna, who he seems to like from the academy, hasn’t been treated well.”

Lucia opened up about her feelings.

“I think maybe he was protesting by putting himself in the same situation.”

She looked at Yoon Hamin with a bittersweet smile. It was truly unfortunate that he had tried to address the perception of last place in such a way.

In Lucia’s view, it would have been better for Kanna to step up rather than take that kind of path, but right now, such thoughts were of no use.

It had already come to this.

“What should we do?”

He was missing an arm. Though it was tightly bandaged, the knowledge that the arm would never come back brought nothing but sadness.

Had a promising talent been lost? Even if the grades weren’t good, even if he had failed in the middle, if one had high enough skills, there was still a chance to gain recognition and climb up the ranks—yet having one arm missing was a severe issue.

I hadn’t expected to reunite in this way, thinking initially that he wasn’t coming to the academy.

Sel glanced at her again before turning her gaze back to Yoon Hamin.

“Indeed, it feels hopeless.”

With nothing more to say or do, all that remained was to swallow a deep sigh of despair.

Ch. 148 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 148

Lucia, who received Sel's contact, came to visit Yoon Hamin in the hospital. Following Lucia's message, Orca Lamiris also came to visit him.

Two days had passed since the incident, but Yoon Hamin showed no signs of waking up.

Unlike other heroes, he wasn't particularly fatigued, but he had been in constant contact with monsters, and after losing an arm, it was understandable that he could lay still for a week.

However, that was not a story Orca could easily accept.

"…Yoon Hamin."

Although she had received contact and found out the hospital's location, no one had come to visit, and he was alone. Seeing Yoon Hamin lying there without any sign of waking, Orca swallowed her breath for a moment.

She wanted to do something for him as a friend, but seeing the results of giving him a weapon made her question if she had truly done the right thing.

She frowned.

"Is Kanna…"

There was not a single person to care for him in the hospital. Not even Kanna, who had been with Yoon Hamin.

In Orca’s memory, Kanna still appeared as a childish girl, so she knew that expecting much would be a burden.

Moreover, just being out in a place like this could be dangerous, and to avoid troublesome situations, it seemed there was no other choice.

It was heart-wrenching to think that Yoon Hamin, who had once fought against their pursuers, was now isolated like this.

She had never expected him to turn away from escape and confront monsters instead, and she couldn’t believe it had led to such consequences. Still, was it really necessary for him to be so lonely?

She did not regret lending him the weapon. At the very least, she had hoped Yoon Hamin and Kanna would have means to protect themselves, as they had felt anxious without anything to defend themselves.

She simply hadn’t anticipated he would use it this way.

No, if she were to hear the situation, she felt she would know what Yoon Hamin would choose.

Did he fight for humanity? To boost the morale of the collapsing heroes?

Being the heir of the Lamiris family, she had no choice but to know the information. This current battle of the heroes.

A long battle that started at 7 PM and barely concluded at dawn. The sight of monsters pouring in felt like a horrific devastation that swept away everything they had.

Knowing the situation of Reika, Orca wondered if humanity could manage to deal with that many monsters. Though she was overwhelmed and had purged everything within her, the fear only intensified as she remained oblivious to the reality.

Were there really even more monsters like that? Even the massive Megalodon, which was enormous enough to be overwhelming to confront with a sword, had yet to be dealt with.

The core was too deep, making it impossible to eliminate such a giant.

In that situation, had they failed to defeat the monsters and continued fighting, it was likely that all the heroes would have perished, leaving no one to protect the barrier, resulting in an unimaginable massacre inside.

Having come close to experiencing such a reality, Orca felt a renewed admiration for what Yoon Hamin had achieved.

It was a discussion about what Yoon Hamin had done, so one could say everything had already been said.

"…Ugh."

"Y-Yoon Hamin? W-We need to find the doctor…"

Pushing aside her deepening thoughts, Orca hurriedly headed to where the doctors were trying to tend to the groaning Yoon Hamin.

Several doctors came and went, and finally, Yoon Hamin began to wake up. Though it took a little time, Orca invested that time entirely waiting for Yoon Hamin since it was the weekend.

After a struggle, Yoon Hamin opened his eyes and twitched his fingers before attempting to sit up.

After lying in bed for two days, his body felt heavy, and as he tried to lift his upper body, he sunk back down again.

"…Cough."

"I'll help you sit up. Just stay still."

Orca grabbed the edge of the bed and adjusted it so Yoon Hamin could sit up like in a chair.

"…Ah, ugh…"

Yoon Hamin looked at Orca, but more than that, his gaze was searching for Kanna. Moments later, it dawned on him that this was the hospital and that Kanna shouldn’t be here, leading him to lower his head.

After confirming his left arm was gone, with the stump wrapped in bandages, he let out a sound of distress.

“Calm down; you’re still a patient.”

“K-Kanna…”

“Kanna? She can’t be here…”

Orca whispered, glancing around cautiously.

Yoon Hamin knew this, but still, the fact that Kanna was nowhere to be seen made his frustration unbearable.

He couldn’t even express that he had left her behind. He felt a wave of anxiety about how much time had passed and where Kanna was.

Was she staying somewhere nearby with the money in the carrier? He wished she was somehow managing at his home, but not knowing how she was doing only increased his unease.

With no way to ease his restless heart, his anxious eyes turned to one side.

“…I’m sorry. But I have no way to contact you.”

Orca wanted to reassure Yoon Hamin, but it wasn’t possible through the voice transmitted by the device.

Since the device on the other end was turned off, it meant she could only leave a voice message. This made it impossible for her to contact Kanna to check on where she was or if she was doing well.

“Ah…”

Yoon Hamin let out a sigh.

Was this the anxious feeling of being unable to return when he wanted to? He felt desperate even.

What if Kanna was struggling right now?

What if she was crying?

What if she was hurt and looking for him?

What if she was scared and unable to sleep at night?

Countless worries jolted Yoon Hamin awake, but he couldn’t just leave that moment. After going through such a fierce fight and losing an arm, it felt strange to think he could simply walk out.

“Kanna will be okay.”

“But, but…”

“Right now, Yoon Hamin, you need to focus on your own health. Look at you; you don’t even have an arm.”

Orca wished sincerely for Yoon Hamin to calm down. However, it seemed he found it hard to settle down because Kanna was out of sight.

Not knowing how much danger Kanna was in and where it might be lurking only amplified his anxiety.

“For now, just try and calm down until you can be discharged.”

Orca, feeling unnerved, set the bed back to a flat position. She worried that Yoon Hamin might roll off if she wasn’t careful.

*

I’m hungry.

What should I do?

I had money to buy food here. I pulled a little cash out from the envelope that Yoon Hamin had packed separately in the carrier.

The issues I was facing were more than just one or two.

Although I was hungry, I needed to spend money to alleviate that hunger. I wasn’t sure if spending the money would be a problem, but I knew there was no one to hold me accountable.

So, should I spend the money? But that meant I had to go outside.

Wouldn’t it be dangerous to go outside? Would there be some strange surveillance around?

If I got dragged out from here, it would be tough for me, and undoubtedly, it would bring worry and anxiety to Yoon Hamin.

Would they really invest resources to capture me in such a situation?

Prioritizing solving the hunger issue here seemed to be the way to go.

Although I wasn’t the type to eat much, perhaps due to the lack of energy stored in my body, I felt hungrier than usual. After two days of only water, my cognitive abilities seemed impaired. Though I thought this level of hunger was manageable.

It was then that a complacent thought crossed my mind.

My time started in the evening.

Choosing to sleep during the day as a cowardly way to stay awake at night because I was scared of the dark.

Just before it got dark, I decided to clench my eyes shut and grip the money tightly.

Let’s eat something. I thought I could buy a few cup noodles. That way, I could manage no matter when Yoon Hamin returned.

I cautiously headed outside. I glanced around, turning my head this way and that.

It seemed that no one was coming to grab me in this situation.

“…Hmm.”

I stopped by a nearby convenience store to buy a pack of cup noodles and looked around.

Should I get the six-pack of cup noodles or different flavors instead?

In such a situation, it was important to prolong survival while eating, so I thought it would be best to avoid getting tired of the taste.

Though I felt a bit uneasy spending Hamin’s money, I could always repay him later…

Once I got back, I could definitely explain myself then.

So perhaps it would be best to get a variety.

If I was going to eat, I thought it would be better to have different foods rather than just cup noodles.

Bread? Bread could spoil if stored too long, so it didn’t quite count as a preservable food.

It would be good to eat something that lasts longer to avoid leaving the house…

“Huh?”

Wait, had I eaten snacks since coming here…?

It seemed delicious to eat. This should be acceptable enough.

Yoon Hamin’s meals were delicious, the food from the academy was great, and the bread sold at the store was nice, but due to the lack of funds, I had never thought of snacking like this.

Even though it was Hamin’s money, I could still… repay him later.

“Sure, it’ll be fine.”

What I could do until Hamin returned was do my best to stay well… He wouldn’t get mad at me, right?

I hoped he wouldn’t scold me for such wasteful spending.

“Hehe…”

As I piled up the crinkling bag, it felt heavier.

I felt a little embarrassed, wondering if I had spent too much. Though no one would chastise me, it seemed I was still overly cautious.

Just as I was about to head home, ready to escape, someone approached and blocked my path.

I jumped in surprise and looked up to see a familiar silhouette.

“…Kanna.”

“Uh.”

“H-Have you been well?”

I had never expected Orca to find me in a place like this, causing my heart to race.

Ch. 149 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 149

Before the evening of that day, I spoke casually to calm Yoon Hamin, but I couldn’t help but worry about how Kanna would be able to escape from that place.

[Miss Orca, as you mentioned, we searched the area, but we couldn’t find anyone matching the description you gave.]

“…Is that so?”

Ivory skin and purple eyes.

It wasn’t such a common combination that it would go unnoticed, especially since she would be carrying a suitcase, so the fact that she wasn’t found likely meant she wasn’t nearby.

How could she manage without using her hands and feet?

Perhaps Yoon Hamin did something on his own, or…

Ah, that would make sense.

Once the question of “how” crossed my mind, Kanna’s moment that she had shown before came to my mind.

At that time, I was also on-site because of mentoring, and the sight of Kanna’s limbs regenerating was shocking to everyone around.

And that timing was none other than the moment of the barrier’s collapse.

Seeing the perfect timing, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that Kanna likely escaped on her own with her suitcase.

I approached the door leading to where Yoon Hamin was.

I sat carefully on the makeshift bed beside him and looked at him.

“Yoon Hamin.”

Hearing his name, his gaze briefly followed me.

Since he had just awakened, I couldn’t make him get up, but I could ease his anxiety.

I even wanted to know Kanna’s whereabouts.

What I could do, without fighting, was to provide support from behind.

I knew that continuing the family legacy would undoubtedly be a huge help to humanity.

But that alone couldn’t save my friend.

Ultimately, saying I would wait for the future to do something only felt selfish, so I decided I had to act now.

“There must be some place where Kanna could be… either your home or Kanna’s own home, right? If you could just let me know the exact location, I’ll look for her.”

I narrowed it down somewhat.

Of course, it could be really hard to find if she simply chose a decent nearby lodging, but considering Yoon Hamin’s current condition, I thought Kanna wouldn’t be able to endure alone and would return.

Isn’t it said that people have a basic instinct to find their way home?

“…….”

Yoon Hamin, who had been grimacing, let out a groan for a moment before giving me the address.

“…Thank you.”

“Not at all. If you hadn’t told me this, I might have been completely lost, you know.”

“…Who?”

“It was mentioned in the documents when you entered our family.”

Upon hearing that, Yoon Hamin smiled brightly.

“Kanna said the same thing.”

“She did?”

“She said she could, so she asked me to help.”

Even though there was a hint of pain in that expression, the fact that there was no trace of regret caught me by surprise.

Now that I thought about it, Kanna had been acting as though she knew everything.

Could it be that she has seen this all the way to here?

“Is that so? That’s impressive.”

The intermittent voice was tightening my throat.

So in the end, Yoon Hamin rushed in knowing everything, didn’t he?

He was the complete opposite of those who were contemptuous at the Academy, merely trying to get by while receiving a paycheck.

I did think that way, yet in reality, Kanna, who was consistently coming in last place, had been different from someone who entered lightly thinking it would be a secure job.

“For now, just stabilize. I will look for Kanna, so I’ll get in touch later.”

“Okay.”

I turned my back to Yoon Hamin lying on the bed and stepped outside the hospital.

“Yes, it’s me. I’ll provide the address, so could you look for someone with the description I’m about to give around there?”

Should I try to look for Kanna around Yoon Hamin’s house?

On the other hand, I intended to visit Kanna’s house.

I wanted to find Kanna, but I was also curious about what her home was like.

When I first found her home, I groaned a bit upon seeing the shabby one-room apartment.

Is this where Kanna lives? I could see that the lights were on inside, but I was unsure if I had the courage to confront her.

I knocked on the door.

But no matter how long I waited, there was no response.

I felt frustrated, wondering if she wasn’t home or just refusing to answer.

Knock, knock, and knocked several more times, trying to peer through the window, yet there was no response, no sign of life at all.

Had she stepped out for a moment?

The lights were on, but Kanna was nowhere to be found.

Considering there had been no contact from Yoon Hamin’s neighborhood, it was clear she was still around, but I wondered if she could find her way to this house after losing her memory.

No, if her hands and feet had come back, would her mind also return?

I was unsure if that had happened before, and my thoughts were muddled.

Should I check the neighborhood?

Since the lights were on, it might not be an outing meant for going far.

Moreover, if those strange people were trying to take Kanna again, I couldn’t even imagine what might happen, so I figured it would be better to look for her quickly and turned my steps.

Close by, close by.

Where would Kanna go in this situation?

While seriously pondering and circling around, I noticed a convenience store dimly lit between the darkening streets.

Could Kanna be in a place like that? Just then, a person wearing a white cap came into view, carrying a rather large bag and stumbling out.

And I was taken aback to find that it was a girl with ivory hair and purple eyes.

“…Kanna.”

Though I had been looking for her, I hadn’t expected to encounter her like this, and a dazed voice escaped my lips.

“Eh.”

Caught off guard by the unexpected meeting, Kanna replied with a stunned voice.

What should I say in greeting?

What words should I use?

After several attempts to think of a suitable phrase, I awkwardly greeted her.

“U-uh, have you been well?”

I had blurted out a strange greeting.

When I thought it was a slip of the tongue, I regretted it even though it was my own words, and Kanna responded with a bitter smile.

“Yes, I’ve been well.”

Though she shouldn’t have been well, considering the struggles she must have gone through, Kanna answered so nonchalantly.

I was at a loss for words, unable to continue the conversation.

While I fumbled with my lips, Kanna rustled the bag in her hands.

“What’s that…?”

“Oh, this? I just bought some food to last until Hamin comes.”

Peeking inside the black bag, I could see some food was indeed bought.

“…You seem to like snacks?”

“I haven’t had the chance to try them yet, so I thought I’d taste some.”

She shyly avoided looking at the bag, as if embarrassed by buying snacks.

Was it perhaps a bit embarrassing that she had never tried snacks before?

What is a life where you can’t eat what you want?

Hadn’t I seen her closely before?

Kanna, who couldn’t even find a place to eat at the Academy.

If the circumstances didn’t allow, buying snacks might indeed be a luxury.

Still, there were so many better things than this, and I wished she would eat better stuff.

After going through so much hardship, Kanna certainly deserved that.

“Then, there’s a new snack I brought from a nearby store. Would you like to try it?”

“No, um, it’s fine. I was going home.”

“…I’m sorry.”

“Eh, yes?”

Seeing Kanna’s reaction, it seemed her memories had returned fully.

If that’s the case, I could understand why she was reluctant about the house I suggested.

How could she forget the time she escaped while training at my house, realizing that being in the Lamiris family wouldn’t be safe?

I had been wanting to apologize back then but couldn’t do so properly.

At that moment, the d*ath of three employees weighed more heavily on my mind than Kanna’s injuries.

Perhaps that’s why I felt grateful for the opportunity to apologize this time.

However, the fact that Kanna feared my home was far from something to be relieved about.

Being alone in a place like this would surely be less safe than staying nearby where she could be protected.

“I can protect you from those who torment you.”

“Uh, um…”

Her hesitant tone indicated she wanted to refuse.

But was her anxiety unavoidable? After all, it was a family tied to an association.

Even so, I had no intention of letting Kanna go this time.

Had humanity not been indebted?

Even if there were strangers, those who knew shouldn’t turn a blind eye.

If humanity wanted to continue living, if they didn’t wish to be destroyed, they couldn’t abandon those who contributed to saving the world.

Therefore, I brought up the possibility of Kanna.

“I’ll let you know which hospital Yoon Hamin is in. If we play our cards right, we could disguise ourselves and go together.”

“…R-really?”

Noticing how focused we were on each other, I couldn’t help but feel they were a perfect match that fit together seamlessly.

Ch. 150 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 150

Thanks to Orca’s persuasion, I had no choice but to come to her house.

The fact that three people died because of my involvement with the Lamiris family made me reluctant to be in this place.

However, since she mentioned Yoon Hamin’s hospital location and offered to help me disguise myself to visit, I felt compelled to go, making it my only option to just close my eyes and come here.

Still, I felt guilty about being there for long, so I thought it would be best to quickly receive help and leave.

“Here. It’s the new snacks I mentioned earlier.”

“…Ah, okay.”

I looked at the snacks in front of me. The luxurious appearance of the treats, which seemed to have been made by someone skilled in baking, made me feel a nervousness I couldn’t quite put my finger on.

I couldn’t help but think of the potato chips and the oddly shaped snacks I left at home because of Orca’s persuasion, leaving me feeling somewhat bewildered by such luxurious snacks.

Not to mention, they weren’t just in a regular snack bag but served beautifully in a bowl. Could I even call these snacks?

As someone without a means to earn money, it felt like my thriftiness was surfacing in this context.

I shook my head and accepted the offering. As I carefully drew the bowl closer, I glanced at where Orca was before reaching out.

“By the way, about the disguise…”

“Oh, that? Kanna’s hair color stands out too much, so I need to buy a wig for her to wear.”

“A wig? Is that really a thing?”

Orca would get a wig? I had never heard of that before.

“That shouldn’t be a problem. It should arrive by tomorrow morning if we order it. Today is already late, and since it’s not visiting hours anyway, I’m just preparing for a good time tomorrow.”

“…Wait, tomorrow?”

So, was that the reason I came all this way just to hear that? Would it really be that complicated to just say she would help and we could meet tomorrow?

I had to go back home again. I had been right in front of my house, and I didn’t see why I had to come this far.

As I was pondering seriously about this, Orca smiled as if she could read my mind and answered, “Yes, tomorrow. It’s not that Kanna’s house is dangerous, but it’s better to be in perfect condition when meeting Yoon Hamin.”

“…Yeah.”

Perfect condition. Did she want to say that someone from the Association might visit?

In fact, that wasn’t an unfamiliar fear for me, so it was not hard to accept. It was just that it was all so sudden, leaving me unsure of how to respond.

“…But if that’s the case, I should have at least brought some clothes.”

“Ah, I’ll lend you some clothes. I have new underwear too, so you can wear that.”

I really didn’t expect her to go that far.

“Okay…”

I couldn’t help but be amazed that it had come to the point where I was borrowing underwear and pajamas. Without being able to say anything, I followed Orca’s instructions, showered in this luxurious place, and sat on the bed in the clothes meant just for sleeping.

“Get some sleep. When the wig arrives tomorrow, we’ll wear that and go to the hospital together.”

“…Tomorrow? Got it.”

I only had to sleep through one night.

“It’s a little hot, isn’t it? It’s getting to be summer, so that can’t be helped.”

“By the way, what day is it today?”

“Today is Saturday, and tomorrow is Sunday.”

“Right, let’s go.”

I hadn’t been able to go to the Academy and had been running away this whole time. I had fallen asleep, and when I woke up, days had passed. In that manner, time had lost its clarity.

“It’s slowly becoming vacation season, but I feel uneasy.”

As Orca said that, she picked up the remote from the table and turned on the air conditioner. The air filled the room, making it not too hot, but not freezing either.

What could possibly make vacation feel uneasy?

“…What do you mean?”

“I just feel uneasy that these situations keep happening… Anyway, Kanna, the bed is big, so sleep comfortably.”

“No… I’m fine sleeping on the floor…”

“The floor is hard.”

“I’m used to it…”

I hesitated, but looking at Orca, I felt a bit remorseful about rejecting her. After all, calling it a floor means that sleeping there would require two new blankets, and I briefly forgot that I needed to be considerate of that.

What if I sounded like I was complaining?

I swallowed my words and eyed Orca carefully. Then I cautiously nestled into the bed.

It felt softer than the bed at Yoon Hamin’s house. The mattress seemed to wrap around my body.

With Orca beside me, I felt at ease, which made it easy to fall asleep.

Even when the room darkened, the presence of someone next to me made it so comforting.

“…Is this okay?”

I tilted my head.

Wearing the wig that I received from Orca, I looked closely in the mirror, but since it was a wig, I looked a bit awkward.

“It suits you perfectly.”

“R- really?”

Golden hair, just like Orca’s.

“Yes, since Kanna’s hair color is so unique, if you cover just the hair, you’ll look completely ordinary.”

“Is my hair color that unique…?”

There were completely white hairs and quite a few platinum blondes as well, but was ivory color that striking?

“Not to that extent… It’s just that Kanna’s hair stands out, I guess…?”

“Really?”

I thought it was a common hair color, but if it stood out, that might be somewhat troubling, and I narrowed my brows.

“Then, I guess I have to be satisfied with this…”

“Then let’s head out for now.”

At Orca’s words, I nodded and began to move.

We got into the car provided by the Lamiris family, headed straight to the hospital where Yoon Hamin was.

“…Kanna, do you know Yoon Hamin’s condition?”

“Uh? No, I don’t know about that…”

“I see.”

I couldn’t gauge what had happened to cause such a mood shift. It was starting to become fearsome.

As my anxiety began to rise, I opened my mouth to dispel it.

“…What’s his condition?”

“Please don’t be surprised.”

From the moment those words were said, I felt like I would be prepared to be shocked. What could possibly have happened?

I almost waited for Hamin to return without knowing anything.

“…Yoon Hamin fought bravely at the front. Even the heroes who were defeating several monsters became weary, but he managed to inspire them merely by his presence and succeeded in dealing with the monsters. If it weren’t for him, those monsters would have continued pushing in, and inside the barrier would have been completely destroyed.”

Orca said that and gazed out at the scenery outside the car window.

“Anyway, because of that, Yoon Hamin was in close proximity to the monsters, and when a giant ocean monster appeared at the end, his arm was torn off…”

Huh, what about his arm?

At the moment I heard those words from Orca, I felt my mind go blank. I didn’t know there was an ocean monster, but I couldn’t possibly have missed the appearance of such a creature.

No matter how big the buildings were, that size would have easily surpassed them.

But what did it matter now? Yoon Hamin lost his arm?

“Hey, Kanna? Are you listening?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I’m listening.”

When I heard that voice, I snapped back to reality and opened my eyes in surprise. I must have missed some of Orca’s words because I was lost in my thoughts.

“We’ve arrived. Let’s get out.”

“Oh, we’re already here?”

Orca stepped out of the car through the door opened by a staff member. I followed suit, exiting through the door opened for me by another staff member.

But more than that, I felt that confirming Yoon Hamin’s condition was my top priority.

We entered the building and searched for the ward. Orca was able to lead the way easily since she had been here once before.

He doesn’t have his arm? Yoon Hamin’s arm?

Why? No, it would be fitting for such a monster, but still, I couldn’t accept that Yoon Hamin had lost his arm.

Even if I didn’t accept it, there was nothing I could do about the situation that had already unfolded. First, I needed to see and then think.

With that in mind, I opened the door.

There lay Yoon Hamin quietly on the bed. And I confirmed that, as Orca had said, one arm was indeed missing.

“K-Kanna…”

Yoon Hamin opened his eyes wide upon seeing me. But I couldn’t find any words to say in response.

I should be happy, but the guilt I felt overshadowed any joy, leaving me at a loss for words.

What should I do? This is because of me. I asked him to fight in place of the people inside the barrier, knowing it was dangerous, and now it’s turned out like this.

What am I supposed to do…

Saying it was to protect humanity is something only I can meaningfully claim. If I were to say something like that, it would only serve as a vile excuse for me.

So, that guilt was something I couldn’t shake off.

It’s my fault.

It’s all my fault.

I know how inconvenient it is to be without an arm, yet I pushed him into such a situation. Was I in my right mind to have asked for him to risk his life, even knowing he could d*e in place of others?

I thought we could win.

I forgot he was just a first-year student, thinking he was strong enough right now.

I clenched my fist tightly, biting my lip hard. I searched my heart repeatedly for the right words to say.

And then, a voice came as if it was saying I didn’t even have to think about that.

“Kanna, did I do well?”

“…Yes.”

I nodded at that voice.

It can’t be helped.

As much as I lost an arm, I should do my part to fight in his stead.

It can’t be helped.

Since Yoon Hamin is hurt like this, I can’t let him fight anymore.

“You did well.”

That’s why I smiled.

To show that his sacrifice was not in vain.

Ch. 151 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 151

Not having one arm was a serious matter.

It was originally there, but now it was gone. So it was inconvenient. That wasn’t the story I wanted to tell.

If one arm was missing, it was obvious that fighting would be significantly affected.

It might seem like a big deal only to use abilities, but whether one has a weapon or not is an important story.

I had to find the core by digging into the body of a monster that couldn’t be penetrated by bullets with a sword, so it was a necessary weapon.

Moreover, if one arm was missing, it also meant losing balance, making the body prone to staggering.

If you lose your balance while fighting, it could be a situation where life and d*ath hang in the balance. So, one couldn’t tell a person with one arm to fight.

Now, I had become a body that needed to escape the battlefield.

“…….”

To achieve what I was thinking, you had to fight like that.

I wanted to see the hero, Yoon Hamin.

But it seemed like all of that was just my greed.

You weren’t given enough time to become strong, and my heart was too impatient.

It’s all my fault. If I hadn’t nagged you.

I’m sorry. What should I do now?

Even if I don’t fight, I’ll live uncomfortably for the rest of my life.

It’s all because of me.

I wished for it, and because of that I fought hard for humanity, but this sacrifice was also because of me.

I guess I have to take responsibility.

Even in this situation, seeing you anxious about whether you did well or if you did something wrong was indeed the Yoon Hamin I knew.

Because it’s a title of a profession, and since it’s a role that protects others, I thought it should be called that. Unlike the predetermined hero, Yoon Hamin suited a true hero.

That’s why I felt guilt toward such a Yoon Hamin.

I moved my gaze and even tried hard to not show it.

“Is it far from being discharged?”

“…No, it shouldn’t be. I’m not here to reattach the arm anyway; I have to go back when things settle down.”

Yoon Hamin moved his right hand and held the stump tightly.

It was covered with bandages and patient clothes, so I couldn’t see it well, but the fact that it was empty made my heart ache.

“By the way, what’s that look?”

“Oh, this is something Orca lent me…”

As I fumbled with the wig and glanced for help, Orca casually spoke up, gently opening her eyes as if she had just woken up.

“I lent it to him. Kanna’s hair is too eye-catching.”

My hair wasn’t an unusual color.

White or platinum blonde hair was in abundance, so this yellowish ivory color couldn’t be that uncommon either.

Orca seemed to be seeking Yoon Hamin’s agreement as she spoke.

I unconsciously twisted my hair.

The hair I was twisting was blonde, unrelated to the color we were discussing, but it was true that I still held some emotion about what was wrong with my hair.

But contrary to those thoughts, Yoon Hamin smiled bitterly, as if agreeing with Orca.

“You’re right, Kanna’s hair color is a bit noticeable.”

“…Eww.”

I looked at Yoon Hamin in disgust, and he continued speaking without caring.

“No, it’s just that… how should I put it? Just looking at the color makes you think, ‘that’s Kanna!’”

“Is that so…?”

I unknowingly grabbed my hair and frowned.

Is it possible I don’t even realize my own hair?

But for a moment, Orca spoke again.

“Well, if the treatment and stabilization are done, should we try to get discharged as soon as possible?”

“Hmm, that’s what I was thinking.”

I couldn’t help but be surprised by those words.

How could one stabilize so quickly after losing an arm?

No matter how much of a protagonist one is, that doesn’t make sense.

“There’s no need to rush. You should rest more at a time like this.”

After I said that, Orca shot me a side glance.

I wondered if I said something wrong and looked at Orca hesitantly.

That gaze continued unchanged, and before long, Orca turned her eyes away from me without saying anything.

Yoon Hamin seemed to be making a sulky expression.

I don’t know why being told to rest in the hospital felt so upsetting, but the atmosphere was flowing as if I had done something wrong.

I was sorry about everything and was at a point where I was concerned about everything, but now I even had to watch the cues when it came to being told to rest in the hospital, making it hard to discern what was right and what was wrong from the start.

After scratching my head for a moment, I quickly turned my head away from Yoon Hamin.

“…What are you going to do when you’re discharged? Aside from resting at home, there’s nothing else to do.”

“No, it’s not that. It just feels like you’ve become a bit blunt.”

“Me?”

What have I become blunt about?

I’m treating him the same as before.

Could it be that they want me to act just like I did when I lost my memory?

No way, that really isn’t possible while I’m sober.

No matter how much Yoon Hamin means to me, I have my boundaries.

That’s a definite fact.

“What do you mean? It’s just the usual.”

“…….”

Orca didn’t say anything.

I thought it was the usual, but the atmosphere suggested otherwise, making me feel somewhat intimidated.

But this attitude seemed to have been my everyday behavior toward Yoon Hamin.

Ultimately, getting any closer than this felt too awkward for me, so I couldn’t do that.

I thought this proper distance was the best, so I took a step back and tried to maintain the atmosphere.

And the result turned out this way.

Finally, feeling intimidated by this atmosphere, I mumbled and bowed my head deeply.

“Um, if it’s okay, then maybe I’ll just go ahead and get discharged.”

What is the right answer?

Is there even an answer to this?

*

One can recognize a person’s emotions through their voice tone, eye expressions, and so on.

Collectively, this is referred to as the atmosphere, but the feelings Kanna displayed since coming to the hospital felt somewhat unfamiliar.

The slightly awkward distance she maintained made it seem as if I was the one who was awkward.

I was so glad to see her for the first time, and I thought Kanna felt the same, but it seemed like something was different.

I regretted having said she was blunt; the atmosphere had become awkward.

Was it because I was too happy to see Kanna that I was hurt by her cold response, or was my mouth too light?

This wretched mouth.

I didn’t want this kind of atmosphere, and I truly couldn’t understand what I was hoping to achieve by saying those words.

“…….”

But for a moment, Kanna’s appearance came into focus.

Her slightly trembling fist and her slightly reddened ears looked strange for some reason.

Is she in pain? I thought while memories of Kanna surfaced.

Come to think of it, her hands and feet were healed, and she was standing.

It was natural since the barrier had collapsed and unrefined magical power had come in.

Did all of her memories come back after she suffered a head injury?

If so, I could say she was the usual Kanna. I could say she was the Kanna Aurora I had been searching for.

So then, if, if her memories had returned, could she remember the moments she spent while she had lost her memory?

If she had created a new persona to defend herself, something hidden within, then when her original persona awakens, the basic order would be to discard the new one.

But since Kanna wasn’t like that, she could be considered to remember.

Thinking back, she had shown some strange signs even before I left.

“Hey, Orca. Can I talk to Kanna for a moment?”

“Are you asking me to move? Feel free to talk; it seems like you have a lot to say.”

“Thanks.”

Orca drew back the curtain and exited the hospital room.

In this hospital room, there were three other patients besides me, but they were still unconscious.

However, thinking that it could be too soon to disturb them, I only drew the curtain around my seat.

Anyway, it was just Kanna and me alone in this space.

“Kanna.”

“…Yeah.”

I gauged the distance.

Isn’t it only natural to think this way when recalling the confession I had made before?

I confessed what I wanted to confess to the original Kanna to this Kanna who had lost her memory. Was the karmic retribution coming back to me?

But she seemed to be a little shy, and I wanted to ask her at least once.

“Have all your memories come back?”

“…Yeah.”

Kanna slightly nodded her head.

“Do you remember everything from when you were with me?”

“…….”

This time, no answer came back.

Could I interpret the silence as a positive response?

The scale of my thoughts was already heavily inclined toward the positive.

“…You see, since your memory has returned, I want to ask seriously.”

“Uh, uh?”

Kanna seemed embarrassed and lifted her head, taking a step back.

Her face was flushed, and her focus wavered.

She was trying to guess what I was about to say.

I almost laughed at how “seriously” sounded like a cue for something serious.

“Don’t you regret it, Kanna?”

But I really wanted to ask something seriously, so I asked.

“What regret?”

“Just, the whole thing from start to finish.”

“From start to finish?”

Kanna seemed to ponder for a moment.

She treated me as someone who was casually targeting a stable job, subtly keeping her distance, even stealing my place to eat comfortably.

From that point, Kanna took a step forward as a hero. Saying that she would protect the future, she moved forward.

Knowing that she couldn’t do it alone, she reached out.

Teacher, and since she couldn’t become a teacher, to me.

Because of that, everything became chaotic.

Knowing the future, knowing what to do, and carrying things that humanity is unaware of, the choice Kanna made,

Did she not regret that choice?

Even if she didn’t know whether it was really protected, and when attacked, it was an act that would garner nothing but scorn,

Even though the people who survived were more conspicuous than those who died, even so, it was obvious she would be pointed at and ostracized.

Wasn’t she regretful for making that choice?

Realizing that it was a serious question, Kanna cooled the heat on her face and tightly clenched her fist.

The fist that came up to her chest seemed to vow that she would speak the truth.

“I regret it.”

I thought she would say she had no regrets and that this would be the best choice.

But that wasn’t the case.

“I often regret that there might have been a better choice, that there might have been a better way…”

Kanna’s eyes filled with tears.

And a small glass bead rolled down her cheek.

“I always regret it.”

Kanna’s gaze was directed toward my arm.

“It all feels like my fault.”

Ch. 152 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 152

I thought wrong.

To me, Kanna seemed more like a hero than anyone else, and I felt that I would never regret this choice. At the same time, I tried to lighten the mood and move on to the next story, but everything went wrong.

I should have realized that Kanna was a more fragile person than I thought. Just being a student like me, it was a mistake to think of her so highly.

She, who couldn’t do it herself, tried to ask for help from those around her instead of straining herself, but there were definitely mistakes made in her haste at that time. There was no way she wouldn’t regret it.

Isn’t there a better way? Seeing the current situation and blaming herself was her nature.

She cried, thinking everything was her fault, apologizing and seeking forgiveness.

Her gaze, which always seemed to carry regret, was fixed on the place where my arm used to be.

It’s not your fault that my arm was cut off. You always did your best.

Even now, just as Orca said, if I hadn’t stepped up, there certainly wouldn’t have been a future where I could comfortably lie in a hospital like this.

There were many things I wanted to say. But Kanna, who wouldn’t be a Kanna that doesn’t regret if I simply told her not to regret, seemed to be

silently swallowing her tears, as if she was going to shout out “I’m sorry” several times.

“I’m just glad we could save you.”

I wished to be a hero just for Kanna. That Kanna wished for me to be a hero for the world.

Is that why? If I could be a hero for the world for Kanna, I promised myself that I would do just that, if only I could.

I smiled.

As if satisfied that this was the best, I continued speaking with a smile.

“If it weren’t for this, humanity inside the barrier could have been eradicated, Orca told me, so you were right.”

Kanna swallowed her sobs.

“This isn’t something that was lost due to bad luck.”

I softly urged her.

“Isn’t it better to think you survived due to good luck?”

Positively. To make Kanna smile, I had to smile first. How could Kanna smile if I had a sad look on my face?

“…So don’t cry.”

“Ugh, hmm…”

Kanna rubbed her eyes to suppress her overwhelming emotions. After wiping her tears, she looked at me with her reddened eyes.

Her mouth quivered. It was natural for the atmosphere to become awkward after crying. So I wanted to move past this atmosphere.

But I didn’t want to take advantage of this kind of atmosphere. I regretted having opened my mouth with the previous atmosphere, so I didn’t want to make the same mistake this time.

“Once I get discharged, let’s go home together. Where did you sleep, Kanna?”

“…My house.”

“… Weren’t you scared being alone?”

It might have been rude to say such a thing to someone like Kanna, but her trauma was that enormous. She hadn’t completely defeated the monster, and the trauma continued.

I wished I could save her from the unending nightmare, but it was regrettable that I couldn’t.

“I was switching my day and night, and yesterday I was at Orca’s house.”

“Oh… I see.”

So that’s why she was wearing a wig and came in the morning.

More than that, I couldn’t even imagine changing my day and night because I was scared to be alone at night. Did she sleep in the daytime and keep the lights on all night?

I really shouldn’t be in the hospital. Just lying still in the hospital won’t give me an arm back.

If there’s nothing more to gain from here, it’d be better to give up everything and just stay by Kanna’s side. The side of the frightened Kanna, and no one but me.

“I think I should start the discharge procedure today.”

“Uh, um? There’s no need to rush…”

“It’s just that it’s too hard here, and other people need to come to the hospital, and if I take up a bed unnecessarily, they won’t be able to get admitted. I’ve rested enough for two days, so I’m fine.”

Kanna seemed at a loss. Even with the reason of it being for others, she couldn’t seem to say anything.

Even if I was discharged so quickly, nobody would say thank you for freeing up a bed. But just the fact that Kanna felt satisfied with that seemed enough.

A hero who doesn’t need to receive thanks. A hero who has no intention of being hailed as a hero.

Completely different from someone in some place who set their profession as a hero by saying, “We are heroes because we save you.” It was a true heroic semblance.

I had seen such a sight before. That’s why I could be certain, both then and now.

Kanna Aurora was indeed the image of a hero I envisioned. And I wanted to live as a hero protecting such a hero.

The first step was to be by her side in the dark night.

“Can you call Orca for me? I’m sorry for bothering you.”

“Ah, it’s fine.”

Kanna said that and wiped her eyes with her sleeve before she hurried out.

Voices could be heard beyond the slightly closed door.

[Kanna, did you cry?]

[Ah, no. Th-this is just…]

[Don’t cry. You fought hard. Everyone will recognize that.]

[…Yes.]

[It would be nice if you could make a prosthetic arm for Yoon Hamin later.]

Hearing that made a bittersweet smile appear on my face.

If possible, I hoped it would be the ability amplification prosthetic arm that Kanna had used before.

With Orca’s help, I was able to start the discharge procedure by the afternoon. It was somewhat fortunate that I wouldn’t lose the privilege of being an academy student since I wasn’t expelled.

Furthermore, being treated as one of the heroes who fought on the front lines meant that I was exempted from hospital fees, not just reduced.

The benefits meant for those fighting for humanity saved my wallet. Orca had said she would help if it was difficult for me, but accepting such financial assistance would have been quite burdensome, so it felt more comfortable to be exempted this way.

“Well then, I’m off.”

“Yeah, thanks. For helping with the procedure.”

“It’s usually a bit awkward to call Teacher Lucia on Sundays, so I have to go to the academy tomorrow.”

Orca greeted me one last time and looked at Kanna beside her.

“Kanna, next time I see you, I hope to see you outside without a wig.”

“Ah… yes.”

“I’ll give that as a gift. I hope Kanna will throw it away later.”

Kanna fidgeted with the end of the golden wig covering her head. At Orca's words, Kanna smiled bittersweetly.

"Well then, see you later."

Orca drove away, and I stood silently with Kanna as we returned home. I felt both awkward and nostalgic looking at the house that I hadn't seen in a long time.

"Let's go inside."

"…My suitcase is at home."

"Oh, right. Well, not just that, as I have other clothes too."

"I only had that one…?"

"Oh."

That was a bit troublesome. I couldn't leave Kanna behind in this situation, and going to her house seemed cumbersome and tiring, so I felt stuck.

Should I just close my eyes and go get it?

Bringing Kanna along would also be a gamble at this moment, and leaving Kanna in this house would also be a gamble. Either way, the situation felt hopeless filled with only gambles, but honestly, I thought surely they wouldn't make a fuss about taking me away after I'd come this far.

But even so, it wouldn't do to leave Kanna exposed, so I thought it might be better to end her outing here for today.

"Then, should I lend you some of my clothes? Sleepwear should be enough, right? Umm, I think I had some underwear that I washed and dried before…?"

"…I'll look for it."

Kanna didn’t seem to mind borrowing my clothes. A short-sleeved shirt and shorts would be just fine, nothing particularly strange about it.

Once inside the house, the first thing Kanna did was take off her wig. The golden strands fell away, and I was welcomed by a bright ivory color, akin to gentle dawn light. As the net was finally removed, the soft hair seemed to come closer to me.

“…”

Thump.

Kanna’s violet eyes turned towards me. My heart beat loudly at that sight.

I wanted to see her. I really wanted to see her, but I had to hold back since Orca was present, so I kept my words to myself.

Tears were about to well up. I could endure the situation back in the hospital, telling myself that it was just that, but now that it was just the two of us, nothing was there to restrain me.

So my eyes misted over.

“Kanna.”

“Yes?”

Kanna turned her head slightly to look at me.

The words I wanted to say since the hospital lingered on the tip of my tongue.

I had felt my heartache from time to time, but I turned my eyes away because I felt not yet the right time.

Initially, I worried it was just a sense of pity. Then I wondered if it could have just been a misunderstanding as we were simply close. Later, I thought perhaps it was admiration for the hero I envisioned.

No, it was none of that.

I wanted her by my side. I wanted her to smile.

It wasn’t sympathy, nor a misunderstanding, nor admiration. It was a feeling I had faced all along, but one I was too embarrassed to confront and had to run away from when the situation wasn’t right.

But could I? Could I truly, having lost an arm? Could I really make her smile?

Could I really convince her, the one burdened with guilt every time she looked at me, to smile?

As such thoughts crossed my mind, the place where my left arm used to be throbbed painfully.

“There’s something I wanted to say before…”

Kanna seemed to recall our serious conversation from the hospital and had a rather ordinary response, merely casting her gaze at me gently.

I stepped forward gently towards Kanna.

After getting closer, I slightly pulled at her sleeve as if to tell her not to go anywhere. I whispered to Kanna, who was staring at me blankly.

“I like you.”

Whether it was possible or not wasn’t anything I needed to be concerned about right now. I simply wanted to convey that my heart was moving through this feeling.

Ch. 153 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 153

There was no guarantee that this peace would last. It was like a sandcastle on the sea, which could collapse in an instant due to the whims of the waves, a collapse that no one knew when it would happen.

Although it was an emotion I had nurtured many times, I had never properly conveyed it.

I had brought it up at an odd time when I had nothing to say even if I were called cowardly, but I had reasons for my stance. It was to ensure that Kanna, who told me to abandon myself, would understand my feelings and not be stubborn.

That didn’t mean I wasn’t cowardly. It was a situation where I couldn’t expect to hear an answer, so I had no choice but to run away.

I didn’t want to say goodbye. I didn’t want to be apart.

My heart hurt. It felt as if the severed end of an amputated arm was throbbing.

Next time, next time, I will surely protect you.

I wondered if such words would ever be kept.

But I wanted to convey this feeling. This time, I wanted to hear the answer without running away.

I was afraid of that. If I heard that we were just friends and that we were here as heroes, it felt like my heart would be torn apart.

Still, seeing Kanna act bluntly in an awkward manner from the time we parted until we met again made me think that it wasn’t hopeless at all.

My heart raced.

It felt like my heartbeat was echoing in my ears. There were moments when it felt like I couldn’t even breathe properly because of those emotions.

I like you.

I shouted that I wanted to do many things together. Kanna Aurora looked at me with wide eyes at those words.

*

It was sudden. So sudden that I didn’t even realize that I was ambushed.

I could only silently stare at Yoon Hamin, who spoke that word that felt like it would turn my head completely white.

As if we were having a serious conversation in the hospital, I tried to be as composed as possible and answered as calmly as I could, but I soon realized that it wasn’t that type of conversation, and I began to feel increasingly awkward.

You like me? I had heard that before, but I wasn’t at the level of being conscious of it.

No, I was aware. It was to the point where I was reluctant to get too close.

That’s why I tried to create some distance, but it felt like my efforts were all rendered powerless.

I already knew. I had known that Yoon Hamin harbored such feelings.

I had tried to look away. I didn’t know if I should respond to those emotions.

Now, I couldn’t distinguish who I was, whether I was Kanna Aurora or my former self, but still, the conflict was something I couldn’t help.

And then I received a confession in this situation.

What would happen if I ran away…?

The choice to answer later seemed a bit unreasonable too.

Of course, because Hamin was here, I felt comfortable and relieved, but did it have to come to this point?

Was I thinking too naively?

I didn’t know. Because I had never learned how to respond in situations like this, I felt even more confused.

Be honest with your feelings? Then I wouldn’t have anything to say except to ask them to wait.

I stood there blankly.

I had to respond to Hamin, but I pondered repeatedly about what kind of answer I should give.

The moment of confession, which clearly existed in my hazy memories, gave me time to think, but I closed my eyes and turned my back.

Because of that, I had to stand there stiffly, unable to move forward or backward, repeating my worries.

In my anxious heart, I bit my lips.

Yoon Hamin was waiting for me with a serious expression.

Ah, what am I even thinking about?

I have to take responsibility.

Yoon Hamin fought for me and lost an arm, and he had to live uncomfortably with one arm from now on, but I couldn’t run away from that responsibility.

That doesn’t mean I was going to provide this answer without any goodwill.

I needed Yoon Hamin. I had up until now, and it was evident that I would continue to need him in the future.

The night was too scary for me to be alone.

I needed Yoon Hamin.

The evils directed toward me within the barrier were so many that enduring them alone had become a burdensome task.

So I needed to cling to Yoon Hamin to survive.

If I wasn’t really going to d*e here, Yoon Hamin had to be by my side.

Ah, what should I do?

Is it just that I’m embarrassed and that’s why my heart races?

I just wanted to be friends comfortably, so when it suddenly shifted to romantic feelings, it was bewildering, wasn’t it?

My heart hurts.

The guilt and apology keep swirling around, and I don’t know what to do.

But separately from that, I would be happy if Yoon Hamin were next to me and wished he would stay.

I like it. I don’t dislike it.

Even when considering the necessity, there’s nothing awkward about it.

“…I, I don’t know. Can you give me a little time?”

Having reached that conclusion, I ran away like a coward.

Yoon Hamin’s expression held a sense of disappointment, and I felt so sorry that I couldn’t figure out what to do.

You fool!

Why do I suddenly run away like this after having made a conclusion in my head?

While I inwardly shouted that, another part of me added words to counter it.

But how could I accept it when I’m not ready yet?

Above all else, it suddenly meant becoming a couple, and I couldn’t help but think about that.

It’s impossible. I don’t think we’re at that level yet…

I unconsciously held my face and lowered my head.

“…I’ll wait. Answer me when you feel comfortable.”

Hamin, being considerate, soon left the spot.

Seeing him naturally head to the kitchen to prepare dinner made a soft groan escape me.

What is the best way to cope in this situation?

My mind was filled with such thoughts that I couldn’t say anything.

“Ah…! Hamin.”

“Yeah?”

“I, I’ll cook. It’s hard to cook with one arm, right?”

“…Is that so?”

Hamin tilted his head.

It seemed he thought cooking was naturally his responsibility, but it felt awkward to leave him alone.

“I’m not that good, but if you tell me how to do it from the side, I’ll try to follow along.”

“Hmm, then I’ll count on you.”

Yoon Hamin smiled and then nodded as if he thought my words were right.

Following Hamin’s recipe and working hard, my previously modest cooking skills reached a decent level of taste.

Although there were slight differences in the details, the taste was good enough to comment on.

The problem was that I couldn’t possibly meet his eyes while sitting across from Hamin to eat.

“…….”

The only sounds that filled the air were the clattering of dishes.

After eating all the food, I cleaned the dishes and even did the washing up without exchanging words with Hamin.

In the awkward atmosphere, I sensed discomfort, and that discomfort was mainly mine.

It was only natural that I had to provide an answer, but since I was avoiding the answer, it was the expected outcome.

“Kanna, are you going to wash up first?”

“…No, Hamin, you wash up first.”

After finishing the dishes, I returned to the sofa and waited for my turn while watching TV.

I started to feel like Yoon Hamin’s house felt more like home than mine.

It was so comfortable, and my heart was at peace.

Well, even though my heart racing was unavoidable.

“Kanna, now you can wash up.”

“I don’t think my hair is dry yet?”

“Ah, well. If I towel it better, it should dry.”

It seemed that drying my hair uncomfortably with just one hand wasn’t working properly.

Even with a hairdryer, I had to move it back and forth with one hand, which wasn’t really possible.

“Come here.”

I grabbed Yoon Hamin and led him back into the changing room.

“Uh, uh?”

Yoon Hamin couldn’t resist my pull and followed me, and I positioned him in front of me.

He was taller and bigger than I was, so I was somewhat obscured in the mirror, but there was no need to look in the mirror anyway.

“Sit here.”

“Okay.”

Yoon Hamin sat on the floor of the changing room, and I took a spot behind him and turned on the hairdryer.

The loud noise filled the surroundings.

I recalled how Yoon Hamin had worked hard to wash and dry me when I had no limbs.

“……Kanna?”

“Yeah?”

“It’s, it’s hot.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

I bit my lips.

I felt guilty for having relied on Yoon Hamin too much, but on the other hand, I felt a bit embarrassed about having left even washing to him.

Back then, I thought there was nothing to be embarrassed about. But now that I tried to perceive him as a romantic interest, the embarrassment felt vividly lingering.

Why was I suddenly reminded of that day when it was all in the past?

Ugh, ughhh.

I’m going crazy.

Am I seriously recognizing Yoon Hamin as a romantic interest…?

I relaxed my grip on the hairdryer as I seriously contemplated this.

I gazed quietly at the back of Yoon Hamin’s head.

It was a moment filled with many thoughts.

It seemed as if I was saying that there was a limit to running away.

Although the noise was roaring, Yoon Hamin realized that the wind was not reaching his hair and slightly lifted his head to look at me.

“…Kanna?”

Seeing Yoon Hamin’s face, I whispered quietly.

“I think I like you too.”

I still wasn’t sure, but this fluttering feeling was probably…

Ch. 154 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 154

Yoon Hamin sat down and looked at me, tilting his head back. I looked down at him while standing.

Our eyes met.

“…I guess I like you too.”

Silence followed that voice.

It felt like I was drowning in his golden eyes. It was like looking at the night sky filled with stars, where all thoughts vanish.

My pounding heart throbbed as if to say it didn’t want me to speak. Because of that, I struggled to breathe, swallowing hard and stifling a groan.

1 second, 2 seconds, 3 seconds.

Time flowed mercilessly.

I gradually began to realize what I had said, and my face started to heat up. The warm feeling radiated from my neck to my ears.

I had never been aware of Yoon Hamin as a man. I thought there was no reason to view him that way, and I believed there was no time for it.

However, Yoon Hamin forced me to be conscious of myself in that indifferent manner. I felt questions like, “You? Me? Why?” arise, but once I was made aware, I started to understand the situation.

Is it all my fault…?

When we first met, I approached him thinking it would be nice to hang out without pretense because it was easier with a guy. But perhaps that felt a bit different to Yoon Hamin.

If that’s the case, then it was undoubtedly my fault and no one else’s.

Even so, I didn’t intend for it to happen that way. Despite trying to justify it, Yoon Hamin’s feelings had already shifted, and that direction was towards me.

And I ended up voicing that answer.

It’s all because I became aware.

It felt like the emotions of that moment when I had lost my memory were rushing back. The desire to stay by his side made my heart race.

I didn’t want to be conscious of it, but from the moment I became aware, the feelings grew uncontrollably. What should I do about this?

Yoon Hamin seemed stunned, as if he didn’t expect me to dodge giving him an answer, and stared at me with wide eyes.

It still felt awkward. I had been forced into awareness, and after concluding that mixed emotions made me like him, I didn’t yet have the desire to get closer.

Unless I were to create distance out of awkwardness and embarrassment.

As much as Yoon Hamin considered me a mental support, I regarded him the same way, but I was unsure about stronger feelings.

Anyway, after a while of silence, Yoon Hamin quietly opened his mouth.

“Um, um…? What, what did you say?”

Even though he had already heard everything, pretending not to have, and his voice seemed to ask for a repeat for some reason, it felt infuriating. Someone else could barely stammer out a word.

I might have been at fault for abruptly responding after asking for time, but it was mutual since Yoon Hamin had also suddenly expressed his feelings and demanded an answer.

Without answering him, I awkwardly lifted the hairdryer I had been holding and pressed it towards his face.

The hot air hit his face, causing him to frown, and before it got any hotter, I turned off the hairdryer and set it down beside me.

“I don’t know.”

Thump, thump, thump.

There was no reason to be aware, but the forced awareness wasn’t exactly pleasant.

Usually, I could have gone on without a care, but now I had to pay attention and be considerate of various things, which was quite uncomfortable.

But this feeling of my heart racing wasn’t uncomfortable. Fleeing like I was escaping the changing room, I slammed the door shut and leaned against the nearby wall.

Clenching my fist and placing it on my chest, the echo became more pronounced.

“Ah…”

What the hell. What does ‘I guess I like you’ even mean? Ugh, I feel really strange.

While grinding my teeth with a tight fist, my head seemed to itch, and before I knew it, I was ruffling my hair.

I’m going crazy, going crazy. How am I supposed to face Yoon Hamin’s face starting tomorrow?! Not tomorrow, it’s even a problem right from tonight when I go to sleep!

If it weren’t for Yoon Hamin’s confession, I could have continued to behave like usual, sleeping and greeting him without any changes.

If he had confessed to begin with, I could have just said, “Oh, okay. But I’m sorry,” and turned him down. I could’ve set a wall between us and proposed we just be friends, but I couldn’t do that now.

Maybe it was all because there was a moment when I lost my memory. The sensations from that time of seeking comfort and those sweet memories of being cared for by Yoon Hamin made my reactions more intense.

I may not have been myself, but the feeling that I was still me welcomed me warmly.

If it weren’t for that, I might not have harbored such feelings.

“Kanna.”

“Eek!”

I hadn’t gone far, so as soon as Yoon Hamin opened the changing room door, I ran right into him.

Grabbing my racing heart, I was just calming myself down when I had to hear it thumping again.

“What, what is it?”

“Don’t go.”

As I hesitated and tried to back away, Yoon Hamin held me with his remaining hand and urged me with a plea. His eyes held sadness, perhaps either out of fear that I might leave or fear that I might disappear.

“I’m sorry.”

Since I hadn’t said anything, Yoon Hamin began to apologize.

I wondered why he had any reason to apologize here, but he seemed to have his own thoughts, frowning as he continued speaking.

“Did I push you too hard? I truly apologize for that.”

“…….”

“If it’s an excuse, I have nothing else to say, but I just hope you can understand. Whether you understand or can’t understand, it’s up to you, Kanna, but I was just worried you would drift too far away.”

Yoon Hamin voiced the worries and fears he held.

“If I lost my memories again, and if you were to disappear, wouldn’t this feeling lose its place? I hurried because I thought it might be too late if I didn’t do this now.”

Hearing his choked voice made me feel like I had nothing else to say.

What could I possibly say in response to that?

“Thank you.”

The tears that formed in Yoon Hamin’s eyes felt like the gentle waves.

“Thank you…”

Yoon Hamin’s lips twitched. It seemed he didn’t know how to gather his emotions properly.

I, too, hesitated, not knowing what to do with these emotions. Was this also mutual?

“Don’t go anywhere… don’t d*e, don’t disappear, let’s just live here. If that’s not possible, let’s go live somewhere else together.”

Even saying that, Yoon Hamin, being human, could not step outside the barrier. I was truly grateful for that sentiment, which made me smile.

If he had gone this far, surely he wouldn’t threaten me. Maybe?

If he still saw me as a danger, then it could mean this situation is indeed my fault, and at that point, I would have no words to say, making me feel like it was truly time to leave.

There was no need to voice such things.

“Yeah.”

Now that I saw a truly nonsensical monster, humanity must have become even more desperate. Reinforcing the lost and damaged power in an instant wasn’t an easy task, leading to even greater fear.

In such a situation, it wouldn’t be strange to think of me as the root cause and wish to eliminate me.

As per that assumption, this incident was hardly any different from something I had caused, so I had nothing to say.

To restore Yoon Hamin’s strength, we had to somehow make a move, as we couldn’t just live as fugitives. Our situations necessitated a change, which led to this fallout.

Thus, I could hardly help but feel guilty.

I felt sorry for humanity, for the faces and names of those I didn’t know. Surely they were living every day in a hurry, yet due to my one action, they had perished.

A scene flashed before me. The moment a person was caught by a winged monster and soared into the sky, only to fall to the ground without a place to hold.

I’m sorry.

I apologize.

Though it was the best I could come up with, it seemed inadequate compared to others, and I regretted it. Was there not a better choice?

I didn’t know. Even if I brought back the past and thought it over, my choice didn’t change. Maybe it was because I was a fool.

While I felt such bitterness, I felt Yoon Hamin’s grip tighten on my hand.

“Ugh.”

Just for a moment of frowning, he pulled me into his arms. Perhaps since he had just showered, a fragrant smell tickled my nose.

With one arm wrapped around me, Yoon Hamin whispered.

“Don’t make that face. Don’t make a face that seems to say it’s all my fault. Don’t make that nonchalant face. Don’t give me the look as if you’re saying you’re going to give up on yourself…”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t say sorry either. Just, just… I wish you would laugh and leave things to me…”

What more should I leave to him?

I had already entrusted him with a lot.

If I entrusted more, I wouldn’t be able to bear it.

Yoon Hamin feared losing something.

I had become his most precious thing.

He was afraid of losing me.

I gradually loosened my stiff expression from those words.

Still wrapped in Yoon Hamin’s arms, I quietly urged.

“No, it’s time for Hamin to rest now.”

“I’m fine. Not being able to fight with just one arm doesn’t mean I can’t do it.”

I urged him with concern, but Yoon Hamin insisted.

Why go that far?

If you crumble, everything becomes meaningless.

“I’m scared of you dying.”

So I spoke sincerely.

And Yoon Hamin answered those words too.

“I’m scared of you dying too.”

It made us smile bitterly, wondering if we had both been living earnestly out of fear of the other’s d*ath.

“…Then we’ll just have to try harder.”

Ch. 155 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 155

I don’t want to d*e. But if I have to d*e, then it should be me. That’s what I thought. I still believed that if it’s possible, it would be better for me to d*e.

But now that Yoon Hamin had said this much, I had no way of knowing which way would be better.

Considering that Hamin’s arm was already injured, I also questioned whether it would be okay to fight properly.

There were more serious worries to think about now. What I should think about and what actions I should take were the most important.

“…Tomorrow is Monday.”

“Yeah.”

“Do you understand?”

“Well, yeah, I got it. Didn’t Kanna know?”

I just found out today that today is Sunday. How often do I really look at a calendar, especially since I’ve been running away so much that I couldn’t even check the time.

Having brought it up for no reason made me feel awkward, so I abruptly turned my head away. Then, Yoon Hamin tried to pull me back into his embrace.

“Why, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing, just…”

Hamin’s hand went limp. The hand that had been with me returned to his side, feeling lonely.

His already unbalanced body struck me as though it might tilt to one side at any moment. I felt anxious just watching him look like he might fall.

“I’ll go wash up first.”

“Okay.”

I didn’t have anything particularly useful to say to Yoon Hamin.

I couldn’t tell what he wanted from me.

How long has it been since I took a shower at Hamin’s house? Just thinking that I could sleep here gave me a strange feeling.

I’ve returned. I’ve come back again.

It wasn’t my house, but the atmosphere made it feel like home. A smile naturally formed on my lips. Perhaps I finally found some peace.

Not everything was resolved yet, but at least being able to take a breath was a good thing.

I felt like a little song was escaping my lips. A soft humming filled the bathroom.

“…Hah.”

Once I stepped outside, Yoon Hamin would certainly be there. It had turned nighttime, so we would have to sleep together.

This felt awkward all of a sudden. Wouldn’t it be a bit strange to sleep together today? Maybe we should use separate rooms for today, and once

we’re a little more accustomed, I could suggest we sleep together later.

Was it just because I felt awkward that I appeared more awkward to him?

Whatever, I don’t know. Let’s just go out and see.

I tightly shut my eyes and finished my shower, exiting the bathroom.

I dried my hair well in the changing room and changed into clothes I borrowed from Hamin.

As I stepped into the living room, I saw Yoon Hamin watching TV. With the towel draped around my neck, I quietly gazed at him.

“Can’t sleep?”

“Oh, I was going to sleep.”

“…Um.”

I was thinking of borrowing a blanket. I thought it might be better to use separate rooms until I got used to things.

But it seemed like Hamin had no such thoughts and stood up. When he turned off the TV, it seemed he wasn’t really watching anything and was just waiting to distract me.

“Kanna, are you sleeping together again today?”

I flinched.

With the sudden confession, a question arose: Did he mean it in a strange way?

Frowning slightly, I stammered but couldn’t find the words to say after seeing Hamin’s eyes, so my shoulders sagged.

“Uh, yeah…”

Why was it that I found it so hard to push away when Hamin came close? If there was a reason that could resolve this, it would have been nice, but I felt regret in not being able to find it.

Was my heart growing weak? It seemed I hadn’t been this fragile before.

Accepting Hamin’s escort, I entered his room with familiarity.

A familiar yet awkward contradiction of atmosphere welcomed me. The fact that I was alone with Hamin in such a place made my heart race.

“It’s been a while.”

His voice flowed gently.

“Yeah, it feels like a long time ago.”

It hadn’t been even a month. It felt like it hadn’t even been two weeks, but for some reason, it seemed like such a long time.

Each day felt so long, and I feared that this pain would never end, but now I realized it was just a fleeting pain that passed in an instant.

Hamin gently took my wrist and carefully pulled me onto the bed. I followed his hand without resistance, lifting my legs onto the bed, feeling comfortable as I leaned in.

“I changed the blanket. How is it?”

“…It’s warm.”

“It feels cool too, right?”

“Well, yeah.”

Hamin said this, then fumbled on the table in the darkness. The beeping sound relieved some of the hot and humid atmosphere.

Orca does this kind of thing at night too; I figured Yoon Hamin was no different.

“If it’s hot at night, I can’t sleep.”

Even in the darkness, moonlight and starlight seeped in through the window. The light softly illuminated his smiling face.

I held the words of thanks in my mouth but couldn’t bring myself to say them.

Instead, I pulled the blanket close and covered my mouth. I couldn’t convey this voice with just my gaze, but I simply wished for it to be understood.

It might seem selfish, but it couldn’t be helped. I couldn’t keep up with the atmosphere Hamin created.

“Kanna, what should we do from now on?”

“…What do you mean?”

“I just want to do everything Kanna wants.”

If he brought up topics like this, later on, he would ambush me with strange words, right? He said he’d be serious in the hospital, and when serious topics arose, he’d confess when he got home.

But I couldn’t stay silent when such words were being said, so I answered with a distraction.

“Don’t I seem like a terrorist?”

“…Not at all.”

“Don’t I seem like a monster?”

“…Not at all.”

Hamin’s voice was firm. But that was just Yoon Hamin’s personal opinion and hope.

“People probably wouldn’t think that. This time, there’s no room for excuses; the casualties arose due to me. It was a choice made by me when I lost my memory, but that doesn’t mean I plan to shy away from that responsibility.”

I clenched the blanket tightly.

“How does that matter?”

“What does…?”

“It wasn’t about everyone dying. Honestly, I want you, Kanna, to care about yourself more than humanity. Of course, if the world ends, there will be nowhere for us to go, so I don’t wish for that.”

Hamin uttered cruel words.

He wasn’t the Hamin I knew. But in truth, it was the same for everyone.

Now, in this moment, there was nothing left that I recognized.

Orca was not the Orca I knew either. Other people also showed sides that were different from what I knew.

It was just that Yoon Hamin, who had been at my side, was more heavily influenced by this. I was the one who had twisted the story from the beginning.

Story, story, story.

Is it just a story? Is it simply just a story?

Here I am, living in the present, but detachedly thinking that it’s just a story, telling myself it’s okay to d*e far away from it.

Dying wouldn’t allow me to close the page and return to the original world, would it?

“Hamin.”

“I know that you care for humanity, Kanna. So even if there are many deaths and sacrifices because of this, in the end, they might be taken into consideration.”

That’s not true.

Stopping what would happen is ultimately a story that only you and I know. The only other person who knows this is Orca.

I was the only one who precisely understood that truth.

The two of them were simply good friends who believed me because I said so.

From another perspective, I might seem like a madwoman who had consoled myself that the choice I made was the best. It could also look like I was a crazy person making excuses after committing a crime.

“Hamin.”

But Hamin seemed reluctant to hear such opinions.

Growing excessively radical, Hamin was solely concerned about me. It seemed that he neglected the deaths of others to focus only on me.

Please don’t do this. You must be the hero for everyone.

Amidst the darkness where no one could see even a step ahead, you need to shine like a star so that those who fear the unknown can find their way.

“Don’t be like that. I’m scared.”

When I spoke as if I were a bit frightened, I could feel Hamin’s breath tremble.

I didn’t want to say it this way as it felt like I was trying to dominate Hamin too much, but this was something that needed to be said.

The runaway Reika wouldn’t return until she could convince Habar. As far as I knew, this was the first time I’d used this many monsters, so there probably weren’t many left.

Humanity, and Yoon Hamin, still had quite a long time left. But to grow strong enough to defeat Reika and Habar, that time felt far too short.

I was anxious.

“…I’m sorry, I didn’t want to say I didn’t like it. I’m really happy… Still, it’s good for me that Hamin is fighting for humanity…”

Hamin remained silent. Then he slowly inhaled.

“Kanna, why do you go this far? You’ve been through something so difficult. Why? Well, it’s good if I’m being praised as humanity’s hope, but it’s a bit heavy and scary.”

Yoon Hamin glanced back at me. I answered him.

“I want you to smile. The hero Yoon Hamin has always smiled through such things.”

Now, there was nothing left to hide. Let’s slowly change, protecting the world by only saying what I know and can express. It was completely different from the time I thought that.

As I chuckled softly, he looked at me with surprise and soon sealed his lips, swallowing hard.

“…….”

His deep gaze stared at me intently. Unable to withstand the continuous gaze, I abruptly turned my head.

“Why, why are you staring? Don’t create a weird atmosphere.”

I said that and abruptly turned my head again. Then, as if disappointed, Yoon Hamin spoke.

“Then can I just hug you from behind and sleep?”

“…Why are you being so clingy?”

“Just because it’s a day I want to be clingy.”

“…….”

Having turned my back to Hamin, I clenched my fist and lowered my head slightly.

“…Do as you please.”

Having said that, I moved a little closer. Although I remained facing away, I felt his warmth.

I was relieved I had turned on the air conditioner.

Ch. 156 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 156

Outside the Barrier. A space infused with magical power, named unrefined magical power, which is harmful to humans. There, people lived. They were simply rejected by the existing humanity.

Since this was already two centuries ago, their development had been negligible, and all they could do was find buildings from that era and establish a settlement around them.

In the early days, there were definitely grievances and complaints. However, by now this had become a natural environment, so there were almost no people harboring discontent.

Without anything akin to a school or academy, their knowledge continued to be passed down from generation to generation. When food was scarce, they would rush into the forest to find edible grass, mushrooms, and flowers, and they would catch and k*ll wandering monsters for meat.

It was troublesome if there were no weak monsters nearby, but still, for the new humanity that had an affinity for unrefined magical power, it was not an impossible task.

Their lives continued in this manner.

One became two, two became three, and thus a village was formed. This humanity outside the wall had survived stubbornly for over two centuries.

“…Hahm.”

Among the surviving humanity, the strongest human was here.

Habar, a human who could tear apart the barrier and veil that had developed for two centuries solely with his own abilities and strength.

A girl with black hair and red eyes, like a monster, was lying on a hammock, yawning.

In this place, there was no room to create something like a mattress, so someone with cutting abilities would often make beds from hard wood, but for Habar, who slept for long hours, that was the main cause of back pain, so he preferred the hammock.

While she was lazily spending another day on the hammock, something appeared to disturb her peace.

“Habar!”

It was Reika, who had revealed herself after a long time.

In her hands, she was carrying about ten totems. Habar looked at Reika with half-open eyes, then sighed deeply through his nose.

Whenever Reika came carrying totems like that, it usually meant she was going to make him do some bothersome work, so recalling that memory, Habar turned his head away.

“Habar, it’s not time to be sleeping. You were awake to begin with!”

“…I worked just three days ago, why are you doing this again…”

Habar found Reika, who was stealing his time, to be bothersome.

Rendel would follow Reika out of fear of his food becoming unstable, but Habar was different.

He could punch down monsters without using magic, but even though he was offered flavorful monsters during the process, he had nothing to rely on from Reika.

Irritated, Habar waved his hand dismissively and turned his back on Reika entirely. Unlike Rendel, Habar was not the type to gather and cultivate monsters. So he still had the monster he received three days ago, and he was in no desperate situation.

“Look, I brought a sea monster.”

However, a proposal that tickled her ears came in.

Three days ago, since he had broken through the wall, this time she was saying she brought a sea monster. At that remark, Habar’s ears perked up.

He had never been close to the sea, so the taste was even more yearned for.

He usually ate monsters that frolicked on land or soared in the sky, but it was rather uncommon to eat monsters from the sea, making Habar ponder enough to be tempted.

The meat of monsters that frolicked on land and those that flew in the sky were certainly different. However, he couldn’t help but think that perhaps they might actually be similar? The thought of a marine creature swirled in her mind.

After contemplating several times, Habar eventually slumped his shoulders. As strength faded from Habar’s shoulders, Reika’s gaze became slightly anxious.

Reika’s proposal was attractive to others, but she was dealing with Habar.

“It’s bothersome.”

Reika, who should have seen the end of the barrier or had to annihilate one side, had yet to satisfy either side.

Thus, to promise the next opportunity, she had gone to tame a flying monster and head to the sea, but this situation was entirely unfavorable for her.

She had gone all the way to the sea to persuade Habar.

“Habar…! Even if I give you all ten, are you not going to do it?!”

The totems fell all over the ground. While existing as totems, the marine monster could still live and breathe thanks to Reika’s powers.

“It’s delicious, it’s something you like.”

“Yawn, I’m sleepy today.”

Reika became flustered, but she had no intention of fighting Habar. She couldn’t win.

Realizing that she couldn’t control him through food like Rendel could and that she couldn’t rule through violence, she grasped her throbbing head and picked up the totems that had fallen on the ground.

One by one, they returned to her arms, but the last one remained on the ground.

“Habar, think well. I’ll just give you this one. If, after eating it, you’re interested, just let me know separately. It’s just that I’m running out of strength breaking the wall. All you have to do is fight with me once inside.”

“…….”

“If you do, I’ll give you the remaining nine, or rather, ten more. You know how many sea creatures there are, right?”

The anxious side in a deal is bound to lose.

As for the other party, it could go this way or that way, and if they felt like it, they could act, rendering it a situation that Reika could give dozens of them but that Habar could decide to get up whenever he wanted.

However, if he undercut it, there wouldn’t be any negotiation itself.

Reika gritted her teeth in frustration.

Without Habar, she would have to gather monsters again, but then just how much time would she have to invest? How much wandering around would it take, and how strong would the monsters have to be, and how would she find and obtain them? That made her weary.

Humanity still overflowed. Reika had only killed a few of those who protected them and hadn't yet properly changed anything.

The result of releasing learned anger had created a reasonable anger.

They would reveal their animosity containing the loss of family, lovers, friends, parents, or children. That animosity would soon become a bond for them.

That fact became the reason Reika had to enlist Habar.

"d*mn."

Reika had to leave Habar, who was unwilling to get up from the hammock, behind and go outside.

*

Having one arm missing was an inconvenient thing. There were too many things that became impossible just because one was missing.

Cooking was too burdensome to do with one hand, and washing up was also burdensome with just one hand.

How should I live going forward? Even though Kanna tried to appear unfazed, the reality was a reality and nothing to be taken lightly.

In truth, it wasn't something that could be dismissed with "arms can be attached and detached." Still, for now, couldn't I get a prosthetic arm like Kanna had?

As long as it wasn't too expensive, even if I wobbled when I spoke, if I could reinforce my hand, perhaps the future wouldn't be so bleak.

Without a left arm, Kanna couldn’t hug with both arms either. Whereas before I couldn’t feel warmth from Kanna’s hands, now it felt cruel that I couldn’t feel Kanna’s warmth because of my own hand.

Should I be thankful that I have my right arm left?

I couldn’t bring myself to think that way, and my heart ached.

Still, isn’t it a relief that I have one hand left? If I think that I could have died right there, maybe that would be good.

Just being able to embrace Kanna would satisfy me.

I hugged Kanna. I felt a pounding heartbeat. Warmth approached me. It felt like I was being heated up.

If it weren’t for the cool breeze, I might have pulled off the blanket because it felt hot.

But for now, I wanted to savor this gentle feeling.

It smelled nice. Although we used the same shampoo, it felt different somehow.

It felt soft. When I held her tightly, her soft flesh felt delightful.

I wanted to hold on like this forever. As if we were one.

The sense that Kanna would not drift away but would stay in my arms was enough to calm me. The fact that she would be by my side was comforting to me, and at the same time, I recalled that we were now dating and my heart began to feel stuffy, so I moved my hand.

“…….”

I could hear a small breath. Was Kanna sleeping, or was she still awake?

From the back, I couldn’t tell at all.

I felt the excitement. I wanted to get closer just a little bit more. I wanted to be nearer.

Is it possible to be closer than this?

Even if the world tries to separate us, I want to leave proof that we stayed together like this.

Is this just my greed? Is it merely my desire? Kanna might not be willing to allow that much.

“…I like you.”

“Eek.”

As I quietly whispered, Kanna’s body twitched.

It was just a casual remark, but it ended up seeming like I had thrown bait to check whether Kanna was asleep or awake. I felt embarrassed and asked Kanna, who was turning away, with a bitter smile.

“…Were you not asleep?”

“Uh, yeah.”

With each word Kanna said, I felt a tremor in the hand that embraced her.

“I like you.”

“…Yeah.”

“I want to stay with you. Like this.”

“Mm.”

Kanna nodded. It was dark, so I couldn’t see well.

I wanted to know whether she was embarrassed or if it was just my insistence that was overwhelming for her. But I couldn’t know, which was

as suffocating as the immediate situation.

Kanna turned over once but still did not look back.

What if I crossed a line? What if she didn’t like it? While I was pondering anxiously, Kanna eventually spoke to me.

“…I do too.”

The pounding heart seemed to want to hear Kanna’s heartbeat, urging me to pull her closer. So with my one remaining arm, I pulled her tightly.

May this night last forever. May this moment continue.

May such days repeat.

Ch. 157 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 157

I thought I had nothing left.

I even thought that as long as I could see the end, it would be fine to let go and disappear far away.

But now, that’s no longer possible.

I realized that the words I had said to him multiple times had become thorns.

Every time I felt that the feelings he showed me were becoming his true intentions and sincerity, I hesitated a little.

Am I not a being that is unnecessary?

Am I not something that could just disappear without anyone caring?

Just knowing that there is someone beside me who gives me value made one side of my heart feel warm.

Now, I don’t have to go anywhere.

Having a place to be is such a feeling.

I clenched my fist.

Even though the memories of yesterday still surfaced and it felt awkward to interact with Hamin, I had no intention of continuing like this.

I wanted to somehow break the awkward atmosphere, but I couldn’t think of any way to deal with Hamin, who constantly expressed his affection.

He would cling to me when sleeping, look at me with a smile while eating, and when he had nothing to do, he would stick by my side as if he had no intention of leaving.

“…Hey, are you going to keep doing this?”

Saying this in a way that sounded perplexing, Hamin, who was clinging to me with crossed arms, slightly raised his head.

“Yeah.”

Wouldn’t it be more appropriate to apologize or to retreat, thinking that he was making things difficult for me?

By answering shamelessly with “Yeah,” I was the one left at a loss for words.

In this house, where the air conditioner doesn’t allow any heat, Hamin and I sat side by side facing the TV. We both took in the news flowing from the screen.

I couldn’t help but be concerned about Hamin’s left arm, which was bound.

He wasn’t usually the type to act this spoiled—why was he like this?

Maybe it was because I kept acting as if I would distance myself.

If that was the thought he was having, I understood that the ongoing anxiety manifested as an obsession of affection.

Then what should I say to Hamin?

At this point, Yoon Hamin wanted and needed me.

Conversely, I needed Yoon Hamin.

In this moment where we both wanted each other, at a timing when it was clear that if either of us disappeared, the other would surely crumble, I also considered what I should do.

The most ideal method was to protect the other without leading oneself to destruction.

Since it seemed that if one of us crumbled, the remaining one would fall as well.

So, what should I do?

What words can I offer?

I thought seriously. My gaze was directed at the TV screen, but my consciousness was centered on Hamin.

I felt that if I didn’t shake off this atmosphere, I wouldn’t be able to stay here any longer.

“Hey, Hamin.”

“Yeah?”

“…I’m not going anywhere. So can you give me a little space?”

“…….”

Hamin seemed to find my words a bit harsh, as one hand, which was holding onto my arm, began to fidget and tried to let go.

That finger, seemingly saying it didn’t want to let go while hesitating, tickled me.

“I really won’t. From now on, I won’t talk about dying in my place or anything like that.”

There probably was no one else who would phrase a request to let go in such an indirect manner.

I knew he liked me and wanted to be close, but it was quite unfortunate that I couldn’t bring myself to say something so cold as “you should let go.”

There wasn’t really a need to say it that forcefully, but still.

I’m not Kanna Aurora.

If Yoon Hamin didn’t exist as I continued to live this life, it would surely be a life akin to hell.

In the end, I had given up nothing at all.

Selfish. I was just pulling everything toward myself.

It was a different result from thinking about discarding something to take something else.

Had I unknowingly calculated the odds and chosen the path that would benefit me more?

Hamin, having heard my words, eventually let go of my hand.

One arm, left alone and looking lonely, fell onto his thigh.

I stared at it intently.

“…What should we do about your arm? Can’t you go somewhere and get a prosthetic arm attached?”

I awkwardly initiated a conversation, but Hamin kept his mouth shut and gazed at his empty hand.

However, he didn’t seem to be falling into depression as he tightly closed his fist.

“It has to be attached even if it’s expensive. If this time they recognize my efforts and do it for free, that’d be great too.”

“Hmm, right.”

He really is strong.

He won’t be defeated just by losing an arm.

Even though having a prosthetic arm doesn’t make losing an arm trivial, the fact that he remained unshaken by having a replacement was definitely a good thing.

“Kanna.”

“Yeah?”

“Will the monsters come again?”

“…They probably will. But it will take time. By then, we need to become stronger.”

It depended on which monster was brought over.

If it was the kind of monster that was as nonsensical as this one, it was natural to feel burdened.

Facing such a Reika would definitely be difficult.

The monsters followed the command center led by Reika, so to capture a frightened Reika once, we had to defeat all the monsters and catch her before she escaped beyond the barrier.

The challenge was high.

If Habar were to accompany Reika upon her return, that day would be the final battle.

The fate of humanity was at stake in that fight.

If we lost, it would lead to destruction, and even if we won, it would be a victory filled with wounds.

Winning wouldn’t mean that humans could suddenly inhabit the territory where the monsters lived; in reality, we were fighting to protect, as nothing could be gained.

He was probably stronger than the Yoon Hamin I knew. But that was when comparing him as a classmate; the current Yoon Hamin wouldn’t be able to defeat the 3rd-year Yoon Hamin.

If he fought while burning his own body, it might lead to a close match, but for now, it was still uncertain if we could fight and defeat the monsters.

“I’ll cheer for you.”

I smiled faintly and offered words of encouragement to Yoon Hamin.

At that, Hamin glanced at me and nodded.

The last time he deeply lowered his head, it was no longer directed at the TV screen nor me.

He seemed to have a lot on his mind.

It’s easy to say he must become stronger, but in reality, finding a way to become strong was undoubtedly challenging.

After sitting in silence for a while, Hamin finally turned his gaze to me.

“You’re really not going anywhere, right? You’re not just going to give up or anything…”

“Hmm? No way. Of course not.”

I thought it was a trivial topic, but it seemed more important to Hamin.

Watching him, a wry smile formed on my face.

It felt good to think that I ranked first in Hamin’s priorities, but it also felt somewhat strange.

Even though I knew I shouldn’t think that way.

He seems to like me, but shouldn’t I be careful about following this feeling blindly?

Isn’t this getting too close? In this suddenly formed relationship, isn’t Hamin being too forward?

I too had my own struggles.

It was difficult to face him while holding onto emotions that were hard to manage.

How brazen must he be to constantly blurt out, “I like you”?

“Hey, Kanna…”

“Yeah?”

“Am I being too hasty?”

Hamin looked a little deflated.

Now, I found it hard to follow his emotions.

Earlier, he was filled with resolve, but just now, he appeared worried and, at this moment, deflated.

Why is he like this? Is it a phase?

Well, I guess he’s at that age…

While I couldn’t help but understand, it was still too burdensome to try to comprehend.

Following his fluctuating feelings was challenging for me because I didn’t really like people all that much.

“What’s hasty about it?”

“…I just kept thinking it would be nice if you stayed by my side.”

Yoon Hamin gave me a deep gaze.

“But it’s not like that.”

His heavy voice, like a confession, seemed to weigh down on me.

“Yesterday was the same. Being next to you makes me want to have a special relationship, and now that we have a special relationship, I want to do special things together, and it keeps spinning in my mind. Even last night and before that, you kept spinning in my mind. I want you to be by my side. Being next to you, I want to be even closer.”

“…Huh?”

Once again, such raw emotions greeted me.

After saying something so straightforward, how am I supposed to react?

So, does that mean that since I accepted the “I like you” from yesterday, we’re now in a romantic relationship? Does that mean yesterday is our first day…?

No, if it’s our first day, I could consider yesterday as that since I said I liked him too.

I furrowed my brows in thought.

But what does it mean to want to be closer?

Does that mean the hug we had yesterday and his wanting to link arms with me from the morning were expressions of those feelings?

“Like yesterday? Like just now…?”

Unable to erase my embarrassment, I brought my wandering hands closer to my chest.

At a glance, it might seem like I was raising a guard to defend against Hamin. There was likely no guard as flimsy as this.

Hamin’s eyes widened at my words.

While his gaze wasn’t frightening, the soft but cold look seemed to convey that that wasn’t it, denying my assumption.

[In the Hero Association…]

The sound from the TV became distant.

The sound of my heartbeat grew louder.

Thump thump thump thump.

My pulse proclaimed its existence with intensity.

Hamin rose and pushed against me.

As he inched closer, the living room light could no longer shine on me.

The light disappeared, and darkness enveloped me.

What I could see in front of me were stars in the darkness.

“Just a little more, …is that not okay?”

The star, wanting to cross the line a bit more, sparkled with its eyes.

It seemed to be saying that it wanted to be greedy, to move forward more hastily.

Ch. 158 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 158

Hamin approaches me more than necessary.

I felt as if my breath was close to him.

Why, why is he coming closer?

What is he hoping for by pushing this way?

It’s too close. It’s burdensome to the point of being overly close.

No matter how much I like him, I don’t think this is the extent of it. Why is Hamin getting so close?

Is he harboring more intense emotions than I feel? Is he pushing this impulse onto me?

My heart began to race. It wasn’t that my heart was beating because I liked it.

Was I possibly in danger? That uneasy feeling surged within me.

Just a little more? What is he trying to do a little more of?

I hesitated and leaned my body.

As I leaned, my body eventually left the backrest of the sofa and headed toward the armrest located gently at the right end.

I slowly backed away with my arm acting like a paddle.

But Yoon Hamin approached me slowly, as if he wouldn’t let me go.

Cold sweat ran down my back. The air from the air conditioner, which I turned on to clear the stuffy heat for fresh air, chilled my spine.

“I don’t know what ‘a little more’ means… It’s a bit burdensome.”

I couldn’t go back any further.

The armrest of the sofa indicated this was the end.

Leaning against it, my hands were freed.

With that free hand, I reached out toward Yoon Hamin.

His body flinched at the gesture that tried to stop him from coming closer, and then he slightly stepped back.

“Sorry. I think I pressed a bit too much when you might not have been ready.”

My pounding heart seemed to calm down somewhat.

I felt like my head was going blank.

Thinking I was on the verge of something dangerous with the Hamin I trusted made me feel somewhat shaken.

Hamin stepped back and adjusted his posture.

Whether he was feeling sorry or embarrassed, he scratched his head.

Turning his head away from me, Yoon Hamin spoke in a slightly lower voice.

“Sorry.”

With that second apology, I groaned.

“…What did you mean by ‘a little more’?”

Cautiously, I asked him.

I wondered if I had the right to question that which he had rejected, but I couldn’t suppress my curiosity about how far Hamin thought of me.

If I know this, wouldn’t it be useful later for sorting out my emotions?

I could decide whether to organize or not.

As I cautiously asked, Hamin seemed to want to hide it, yet he felt some responsibility for not saying anything in this situation, and he spoke quietly.

“I just wanted to do things like a couple.”

Maybe he felt guilty because he didn’t look at me.

He just stared at the floor in front of him.

“Of course, I know that it’s only been a day since I confessed yesterday and you accepted. But, but I’ve been thinking about you since…”

Hamin bit his lip.

He looked like he was trying to hold back emotions that were about to burst forth.

“Ever since you stayed at my house, I keep having weird thoughts…!”

The feelings he had tried to suppress burst out, and maybe due to that self-loathing, Hamin held his head and curled up his body.

His head, deeply bowed, crashed toward his knees.

Hearing those words, I couldn’t help but be shocked.

Wait, the moments when we stayed at my house…? We were just friends then.

What exactly happened…

“Uh, eh? No, was it from the time I asked to stay over?”

“No, that’s not it. It’s just every time you come closer… Of course, you might not have cared thinking of me as a friend, but it was hell for me to endure that each time.”

That hit home.

“I endured it. Honestly, I tried hard to endure it. I didn’t plan to say I liked you as an excuse to do something like this. I don’t know. I like you, and it’s so good that I can’t stand it anymore, but it’s hard to explain that it’s irrelevant…”

I couldn’t understand Hamin’s words.

His emotions were swinging back and forth, controlling him arbitrarily.

It felt like I was gripping the steering wheel, wildly racing forward.

Watching him, I felt a bit baffled, and confused that the subject was me.

“So, liking you is one thing and wanting to do more things with you is another…?”

“…Yes.”

Hamin nodded at my organization, deciding that he couldn’t respond rationally in this situation.

I understood why he felt confused.

After saying he liked me, seeing him rush in the next day gave rise to enough doubt that maybe he said he liked me for this reason.

I thought I was more comfortable with Hamin than with Orca, and I had approached without much thought several times.

To recall why Hamin started looking at me like that, I pondered seriously.

And soon after, too much came to mind, and I too felt guilty.

Didn’t I approach him asking to stay over? Didn’t I ask to sleep over because I was scared? Even though I had a prosthetic arm and leg, didn’t I ask him to wash me because I was afraid I might get electrocuted due to my ability?

What to do, thinking of so many things…

All this seemed to be my fault…?

Hamin seemed to have accumulated too much over time.

The things that he had endured, after sharing feelings of enjoyment with me, seemed to have loosened his control.

I felt a bit sorry. Hamin didn’t have anything to be sorry for.

I hesitated, then eventually wrapped my legs around to figure out how to speak.

Saying “It’s not your fault” didn’t seem effective.

It would be better for him to realize naturally that he wasn’t at fault.

“Hamin.”

“…?”

“Then, what do you like about me?”

I tried to bury my face in my knees, but since Hamin was looking at me, I turned my head toward him.

It felt a bit resistant to maintain eye contact after asking such a question.

Should I be embarrassed? Would it sound bothersome to ask? I felt my face getting hot.

But if I run away from this, Hamin might think I started to hate him.

Maybe it would be better not to back down.

As I threw out my question, Hamin moistened his dry lips.

“It’s embarrassing… You’re kind, and, um… heroic…”

“Me?”

“Yes.”

Hamin might have been desperately trying to prove that he didn’t say he liked me just to do such things, and he opened his mouth, desperately suppressing his embarrassment.

I noticed his face slightly reddening.

Simply watching him, I could confirm that his words were sincere, and I couldn’t help but smirk.

I wasn’t just misunderstanding or doubting him, but the fact that I kind of understood was pleasant.

For a moment, silence hung in the air.

Then, taking a deep breath, I quietly spoke.

“Sorry, you must have had a hard time because of me.”

“No, that’s not something to be sorry for…”

“I also know I was being reckless.”

I turned my head while saying that.

I thought it would be too much to look at Hamin’s face while saying this, so I buried my face in my knees.

“I was a little surprised when you suddenly got close. I didn’t even think about how I had gotten close.”

I chuckled self-deprecatingly and then looked up.

My gaze fell on the TV that was talking to itself. But my consciousness wasn’t focused there.

Yoon Hamin, if such stimuli were given, I could understand that.

I thought it was commendable that he endured it.

But if he talked that way, it might only make him more concerned.

“I guess I wasn’t taking it seriously back then.”

As I mumbled, Hamin remained silent.

When he closed his mouth, a stillness hung in the air. That quietness seemed to urge me to speak more.

“I’ll think seriously. If you tell me what you want to do, I’ll think hard and prepare my heart.”

I turned my head to look at Hamin again.

After calming myself down one more time and making eye contact, my emotions stabilized to some extent.

After I finished speaking, silence returned once more.

This time it seemed to be Hamin’s turn to speak.

It seemed to be an answer to what I had said.

“…I want to hold hands, and I want to hug you…”

“We’ve already done all that.”

I responded with a bitter smile.

We had already slept like that yesterday; why was he suddenly asking for something new?

“I want to do it again.”

“…Really?”

Hamin continued speaking calmly.

I didn’t know what kind of emotions he had, but it seemed that opening his mouth to say this required quite a bit of courage, as his hands moved awkwardly.

His fingers intertwined, clasped together, then released, repeating the motions.

Even as an observer, I started to feel uneasy about his fidgeting.

“I also want to kiss… and sleep together…”

Hearing that made me feel shy instead.

I realized what he meant by wanting to sleep together, and my lips slightly protruded.

“So, I see.”

“…….”

“I’ll think about it seriously.”

I was only saying what I had said.

I would think hard and prepare my heart.

It was natural to say so since I couldn’t avoid it completely.

Thus, the conversation concluded on a somewhat awkward note.

Another day was about to pass.

The sun set, and the moon rose.

Evening turned into night.

While I tried to prepare myself well today, Hamin subtly watched me.

“…Today, can we sleep holding hands?”

Since we slept hugging yesterday, holding hands is rather mild.

“Well, then I should lie on the right side today.”

As I naturally responded, Hamin’s eyes widened, as if he didn’t expect me to agree easily.

“Is that okay?”

“…Yesterday, I slept while hugging, so what’s the big deal about holding hands?”

Hamin slightly nodded at that comment and quietly returned to take his place on the left side of the bed.

We lay down side by side, and I quietly held Hamin’s right hand.

Then, as if that hand felt my warmth, it tightly gripped mine.

I felt Hamin’s gaze on me.

I glanced at him and then shifted my gaze to the ceiling.

“…I like you.”

“Don’t say that.”

“Why?”

“It’s embarrassing.”

What on earth did he keep thinking when he kept saying he liked me…

Yoon Hamin truly was thick-skinned.

Covering my face with my free right hand, I already felt the heat rising.

“But I don’t know when I’ll be able to say that I like you again.”

“…….”

And with that heat, it dropped drastically.

I thought Hamin’s affectionate actions were just something typical for a teenage boy, but I welcomed the realization that it stemmed from a fear that he might not be able to share such feelings again.

Why?

No, there was no need to ask why.

We had nearly broken up three times, possibly even four.

We almost parted ways with a barrier between us,

And we almost parted ways between this world and the next.

Although we were not particularly close then, even if we became special afterward, such crises would still come, making it seem more like that.

So he was anxious.

I was just taken by surprise and thought I could take my time. I thought I could prepare my heart. I thought that way.

Even if we say we won’t fall apart because we need each other, we hadn’t voluntarily fallen apart in the past, so it felt even more anxiety-inducing.

It was an unavoidable emotion.

It was a comprehensible emotion.

That made the feeling even more poignant.

If I kept delaying it for no reason, it seemed like it would leave more regrets, and my heart ached.

“…Me too.”

“I like you.”

“I like you.”

So, in the end, I accepted Hamin’s cheesy actions.

Words that were hard to say, even if I knew, were spoken.

They continued and continued.

Words, hands, and then, us.

The morning chirping of birds greeted me.

Startled from my stupor, I quickly pulled the blanket up to my body.

I thought it was nice to have the air conditioner on and to be half-dressed under the blanket, but in this moment, I wished I wasn’t half-dressed.

“Ugh, ughhhh…”

Am I crazy?

Ch. 159 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 159

In the dark space, our intertwined hands trembled. Hamin repeatedly conveyed his feelings to me: “I like you.” It became increasingly distracting as I realized it was not just an innocent display of affection.

We might not know when we would part again. Hamin clung to me repeatedly because that thought terrified him.

After realizing that fact, I came to understand his emotions and couldn’t bear to treat him coldly.

I could no longer push him away with words like “It’s scary,” or “It’s burdensome.”

The barriers separating us were either a wall or d*ath. Even if we claimed we would go outside the wall together or d*e together, we wouldn’t meet there again.

After all, it would end in a breakup.

Hamin also spoke well, but he couldn’t turn away from that reality, which made him anxious. That anxiety was expressed so blatantly.

He was anxious.

I took my time sorting out my feelings, realizing that wouldn’t work. I thought that only after a breakup would my heart settle, and then both Hamin and I would regret it and hold onto lingering feelings, which constantly drew my heart in.

Once I understood, I kept leaning in. My feelings, my heart, my gaze.

I tightened my grip on his hand.

I returned his words exactly.

“…Me too.”

Procrastination would only leave regrets. If I ended up regretting it, it would be painful and lead to tears.

That’s why I voiced it. I tried to imitate Yoon Hamin’s affectionate gestures, which felt burdensome.

In truth, I felt resistance because my face felt like it would burst. I felt my face heat up, as if it was overloading.

But perhaps Hamin was glad to see me answering despite such embarrassment since he continued speaking without a word.

“I like you.”

His voice seemed to urge me to keep going, and I closed my eyes and opened my mouth.

“I like you.”

“I like you.”

Hamin responded sharply to my voice. His head casually turned to the side.

When I glanced over, I saw his golden eyes fixed intently on me.

“…I really like you.”

As he said this, he gently pulled my hand towards him.

He must want to progress quickly because of his unease, right? But I didn’t feel inclined to move forward this way…

Ugh, ugh. Still, if Hamin could feel at ease like this, wouldn’t that be okay?

“Wait a moment.”

“…Why?”

“It feels like the atmosphere is leaning too much this way…”

I reached out towards Hamin, who was gazing at me intently. I was tightly holding his right hand with my left, but my free hand seemed to want to push Hamin away.

Yet it wasn’t complete rejection.

“…If you don’t like it, I won’t do it.”

“Ah, no! That’s not it…”

What’s with the blatant disappointment? Isn’t an aspiring hero supposed to be more emotionally stable?

“I just think it feels too rushed… Even if this is too much, maybe a kiss would…”

“……Really?”

I hoped this would be acceptable. I thought so after saying that.

After I spoke, Hamin’s body trembled slightly. His body turned toward me.

“Ugh.”

“H-Hamin, your arm must hurt. Don’t move that much.”

“No, it’s fine.”

“…Just lie still.”

After pulling away from Hamin, who insisted he was fine, I sighed. I released the hand I was holding and quietly nestled beside him.

Now that I thought about actually kissing, it felt like my heart would burst.

Is this the right thing? Wouldn't it be less uncomfortable to just relinquish my body? But isn't that too much?

What should I prioritize? Feeling our faces touch felt peculiar to me, and mixing our bodies felt odd psychologically.

It felt like I wasn't ready for any of this yet…

It's true I like him. I was uncertain just how much I liked him, which made it ambiguous. If I understood why Hamin was anxious, perhaps I should prepare for the possibility of breaking up ahead of time.

To ensure we both remember we shared warmth even after parting. To stabilize his emotions.

I used Hamin's right arm as a pillow and nestled into him. My arm pressed against his side. Quietly, I tapped my lips on his cheek.

That alone felt like my head would explode, making me pull away abruptly.

"Is this, is this okay?!"

A shriek akin to a bird's escape escaped my lips. My emotions were too intense for me to manage properly.

Turning abruptly, I leaned against Yoon Hamin's arm and pulled the blanket over my face.

Ugh, please forgive me. Honestly, I gathered quite a bit of courage for this. It hadn't even been a day since I conveyed my feelings this morning.

"Kanna."

"Why…?"

“…I, I’d prefer it if you did it with your lips…”

As the area changed, I felt too shy. But if I ran away from here, there probably wouldn’t be many chances again. Don’t they say you have to strike while the iron is hot?

“J-Just once.”

I said that, then sat up, bringing my lips to Yoon Hamin’s.

If I opened my eyes, I wouldn’t be able to concentrate.

I tightly shut my eyes and leaned in.

“Ow!”

Perhaps due to being too tense, it turned into more of a lip bump than a kiss. My mouth got a little cut from my teeth, but fortunately, such a small injury would heal quickly.

Yet, the stinging sensation remained, and as I licked it with my tongue, this time Hamin’s body jolted upright.

My body, occupying the side, rolled over as his arm was raised vertically.

“Hyuh.”

“Can I try?”

I felt like I might hiccup. It took considerable effort to nod my head.

“I like you.”

“…….”

I couldn’t say anything and just squeezed my eyes shut while slightly pouting my lips. I couldn’t bring myself to fully commit, nor could I keep them still, resulting in this.

Hamin looked down at me from above.

Despite having only one right hand, he approached me, balancing his body with that single arm. Even in the dark, I could surely feel his warmth drawing near, even with my eyes closed.

His lips softly met mine.

What if our breaths came together? With that thought, I instinctively held my breath, struggling to contain it as my heart raced wildly.

When Hamin finally pulled his lips away, I could breathe again.

“Whoa, ah…”

As I exhaled in rapid breaths and squinted my eyes open, I saw Yoon Hamin’s face had turned red even in the darkness.

He must think this is embarrassing, right? Or does this act simply flush his face?

For now, I needed to catch my breath. My chest expanded and contracted repeatedly. If my breathing became too rough, I felt like I would bid farewell to sleep.

“…Kanna.”

Hamin didn’t seem inclined to give me a break.

“Oh, yeah.”

“I like you…”

“Ugh, uh-huh, me too.”

I nodded while resting my head on the pillow.

But his declaration of affection didn’t signal an end; it rather seemed to herald a beginning as Yoon Hamin’s lips came back toward me again.

“Ugh?”

Yoon Hamin’s lips were stifling my breath this time. Instead of feeling shy, I desperately squirmed, trying to breathe while my eyes were tightly shut.

“Puhah! Wait a moment…”

He stepped back. Even as he retreated, there wasn’t much space left to back away.

“Just tonight… I won’t act spoiled anymore tonight…”

As I listened to Hamin’s earnest voice, my heart felt weak again. I had deliberately paused at the kiss line, but was he longing to continue this kiss or wanting to progress further?

What should I do? I tightly shut my eyes once more.

“Ah, alright. Just tonight…”

It felt like a strongly ambiguous response.

Anyway, there’s no need to be more precious with lips I’ve already permitted to be kissed. If I could express satisfaction with this, that would be more than enough.

Moreover, since he said he would act spoiled only tonight, it seemed unnecessary to be overly harsh.

After seriously contemplating, I sat on the edge of the bed. Yoon Hamin slowly drew near.

He looked more comfortable than before. His stance was more stable, resting his upper body on his right arm.

The body that moved over me was approaching to claim my lips.

Yoon Hamin’s breath was getting nearer. It seemed he was also a bit out of breath from holding it in.

Ah, my lips are touching again like this.

Once again, I accepted Yoon Hamin’s lips.

“Ugh, hmm…”

There weren’t any sounds of our lips meeting. But the silence was filled with our breathing, and the soft moans from both of us saturated the quiet space.

“Whoa… huff.”

Uncontrollable sounds escaped my mouth. Could such sounds really come from me? It felt strange.

My face was already hot, feeling even without having to touch it with my hands. I wished for the air conditioner to cool my face down quickly.

“Is, is it time to sleep…?”

“Can I sleep while hugging you tonight?”

“…Do as you like.”

Tonight, just tonight.

Ch. 160 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 160

In the end, I lay down again after changing positions. It was only natural since Yoon Hamin, who only had his right arm, had to lie on the right side of the bed to hold me.

Hamin said he would only act spoiled today, so I eventually gave in.

I lost count of how many times we kissed. He kept kissing me as long and as much as he wanted, making it hard to breathe, and I was too dazed to keep track.

Besides, it didn’t seem meaningful to count anyway.

Was it always going to end like this? I thought it would be fine if we just held hands and slept, but in the end, I had to hold Hamin from behind.

Sleeping while being held by someone is a bit difficult, but I had already agreed to it, and since I was tired, I thought I’d fall asleep quickly, so I closed my eyes gently.

Hamin’s right hand slowly moved and wrapped around the lower part of my chest, near my ribs. His touch felt like he was embracing a corpse, and I let out a bitter laugh, curling my body slightly like a shrimp.

“…Ouch. Ha, Hamin?”

But soon, his hand became a bit more mischievous.

Startled, I turned my head slightly and saw that Hamin’s hand was now heading toward my chest.

“Just for today…”

I thought he was sleep-talking. I suddenly worried if “just for today” didn’t include kisses or this kind of spoiling.

No, but Hamin worked so hard for this…

He fought so hard for me that he lost an arm, so shouldn’t there be some reward? Besides, he’s desperately trying to leave some proof because he doesn’t know when I might disappear. Is that really a bad thing?

After all these thoughts, I bit my lip and clenched my fist.

The hand that hesitated at my voice eventually stopped. Even if he kept saying “just for today,” he would stop if I said no.

Should I call him gentle, or is it a bit bothersome that I have to put on the brakes myself?

It’s fine now. If it’s Hamin, it’s fine.

He saved the world, didn’t he? He fought so hard for me to get to this point.

“…It’s fine. I like Hamin…”

It was a time when a reward was needed. That doesn’t mean I’d completely sacrifice myself to make him feel better. I wasn’t thinking like that.

I was still scared. The fact that I had to accept pleasure in this body was terrifying, but there was nothing I could do about it.

But even so, I didn’t dislike Hamin, and I wanted him to start the day in a good mood rather than feeling discouraged, so I didn’t stop.

When I said that, Hamin pulled his arm away from holding me. Using that one arm, he lifted his upper body and sat on the bed, looking at me.

I glanced back at the sound, and Hamin’s eyes seemed to glisten. His eyes sparkled in the light coming through the window.

“Really…?”

His trembling lips asked for the truth. I answered with silence, which soon turned into affirmation.

Hamin’s body gently covered mine.

Our lips met again. Again? No, this time, Yoon Hamin’s lips parted, and his tongue pushed inside.

“Huh?”

I thought I heard a strange sound. I couldn’t breathe well, and Hamin kept pushing his tongue inside, leaving me feeling bewildered about what to do.

But if I closed my mouth, I’d end up biting his tongue, so I desperately kept my mouth open.

The more I did, the more Hamin’s tongue explored every corner of my mouth. My tongue, with nowhere to go, eventually tangled with Yoon Hamin’s, trying to find a place.

It felt like tears were welling up in my eyes.

No, no, no.

Just as I thought that, Yoon Hamin, who was barely breathing, touched my clothes.

“Really, are you okay…?”

Just a moment ago, it seemed like he would go straight ahead without brakes, but now that it came to it, he stopped.

“…If not now, I won’t allow it later…”

When I turned my head sharply and said that, Yoon Hamin happily moved his hand. Even with only one hand, he was so excited that it was impressive.

The short-sleeved shirt I borrowed from Hamin was pulled up to my neck.

My chest and abdomen were exposed, and I felt the cool breeze from the air conditioner. My body temperature, which had risen so much, seemed to cool down a bit.

And then his hand hesitantly moved toward my shorts.

“W-wait…”

Despite my protest, his hand reached my waist.

The shorts were pulled off before I could resist. Eventually, I was left standing in front of Yoon Hamin in just my underwear.

I’ve been n*ked before, and I’ve had my underwear changed before, but this time, I felt a strange emotion, and my face kept getting hot.

My heart was pounding.

Yoon Hamin looked at me, swallowed his saliva, and mumbled.

“No, uh, that…”

Was he scared now? Just as I thought that, a small voice came from his mouth.

“I don’t have a condom…”

Since it wouldn’t matter after I died, I let out a bitter laugh.

“It’s fine without it, right?”

“Really?”

“If you’re worried, we can get some medicine tomorrow…”

Hamin seemed even more excited by that, revealing his arousal that even his shorts couldn’t hide.

“Hik!”

Hamin immediately moved his hand to touch me over my panties. It was a place where his hand wouldn’t normally reach, so the sensation was sharp.

My shoulders flinched. Thinking I had to endure, my hand lost its place, and my fist clenched tightly.

When I came to my senses, Hamin’s hand had already pulled my panties aside and was touching me. I closed my eyes tightly and trembled.

“Hah, ouch, w-wait, there…”

“…….”

Hamin seemed to have lost himself, or maybe he was focused there, as he tried to push his finger inside. He seemed to be exploring, then moved his finger diligently, making me think, “Men are men,” and I closed my eyes tightly.

“Ah, uh, hah, ouch…”

“Ah, did it hurt? Should I go a bit softer?”

“Uh, j-just a bit softer…”

Hamin’s hand became gentler.

I hadn’t masturbated since I got this body, and I didn’t expect this result. I didn’t want to feel this sensation, but the tingling in my head made me feel like I was floating.

The strong stimulation felt like electricity was sparking in my head. I thought it might be an overload, but it wasn’t.

A creaking sound I’d never heard before came from my body. I couldn’t believe it. That sticky liquid was coming from my body.

But it was already reality, and Yoon Hamin, thinking I was ready, pulled out his large p*nis.

The monster that came out after taking off his shorts was tamed by his one remaining right hand and aimed at me.

“…Ah, uh, that…”

It’s bigger than I thought?

“Should I put it in…?”

He said it like a question, but the tip of his glans was already trying to push into my wet entrance. It seemed to fit perfectly, as his hand left his p*nis, and his body leaned toward me.

He seemed to be covering me from above, and his face came closer to mine.

Did he want to kiss again? As his head came closer, I tried to respond by slightly sticking out my lips, but that made his lower body come closer too.

With a squelch, the sensation of being forcibly opened made tears well up in my eyes.

“Huh, ah…”

I let out a pained m*an, and Yoon Hamin, who was about to kiss me, stopped in surprise.

“A-are you okay?”

“I’m… not okay…”

I wanted to say I was fine, but I couldn’t. It hurt too much. The tingling sensation was too much to laugh off, and tears welled up.

Ah, it hurts.

As I moaned, I felt Yoon Hamin’s p*nis pull out. It seemed he was pulling out because I was in too much pain.

“Huh, b-bl**d…”

Hamin panicked and sat up.

It hurts, it hurts… I felt like my entrance was tearing, and now there’s bl**d. It seemed like a natural result of forcing that monster in, so I couldn’t think of anything to say.

“Ah…”

I let out a small m*an.

I tried to sit up, twisting my body, but the sensation of being stirred inside kept lingering. It felt numb, and I didn’t know how to process this feeling I was experiencing for the first time.

“Sh-should we stop…?”

Hamin, panicked by the bl**d, tried to back away. It seemed he thought it wasn’t the time to do this, considering my body.

I frowned at him.

“It’s not because of the bl**d… Just, just do it… You said just for today.”

“But…”

“…….”

I don’t know Kanna’s unspoken life. It was a life where nothing could be guaranteed.

But at this moment, having come this far, I couldn’t accept suddenly running away. So I said something I didn’t know was true or not.

“…It’s my first time, so.”

Hearing that, Hamin turned his body back toward me.

I knew it was hard to predict how the other person would react when I said something like this. But if he suddenly backed off here, it would be strange, and I didn't like the idea of having to do this again later, so I urged him on.

"Put it in again…"

I didn't want Hamin to say later, "We didn't count that time…" so I blocked the escape route.

At my words, Hamin let out a groan of agony and came closer to me. Even while being concerned about my body, he couldn't ignore my words.

"Ugh…"

With a whoosh, Yoon Hamin's p*nis pushed into my body again. At the sensation, my legs tightened on their own, but Yoon Hamin's body was already between them, so my thighs couldn't touch and instead wrapped around his waist.

"Ah, huh, it's weird…"

An indescribable sensation stirred inside me. Hamin, perhaps concerned about me, moved his hips slowly.

Rather, that made the sensation of being rubbed inside drive me crazy.

I thought Hamin's ability might as well be an electric ability, as my head was tingling with stimulation.

Because of his p*nis, my lower body was floating above the bed, shaking as if it might touch it.

"Kanna… are you okay?"

"…I-I'm, uh… okay…"

Yes, ah, I kept letting out meaningless moans I didn't want to make.

I tried to cover my mouth, but the shaking made it hard to keep it closed, and the sounds coming from my throat couldn’t be stopped.

“Kanna, Kanna…”

Hamin seemed to be getting more into it, moving his hips more intensely than before. As the movements got faster, my hips started to arch upward on their own.

“Huh, huh, hah, ah…”

Thrust, thrust, his p*nis filled me up. It felt more like being forcibly opened and stirred than being filled, but the complex, mysterious sensation took my mind away.

The squelching sound tickled my ears.

The sound got faster.

Our bodies collided. My groin felt a bit numb. Well, it was really my entrance that was numb.

Yoon Hamin’s p*nis thrust deep inside me, again and again, giving me strong stimulation repeatedly. They say repeated stimulation dulls the senses, but for some reason, this made my mind go blank.

It hurts, it hurts. But I feel like I’m floating. Stop, ah.

Even though I didn’t know anything, I instinctively knew. I hadn’t learned it, but I realized this sensation was the climax.

I couldn’t open my eyes wide. I couldn’t even bend my hips forward.

As I trembled, Hamin grabbed my hips and increased the speed.

“Hah, not yet, ah, huh…!”

I forgot to cover my mouth and grabbed the blanket below tightly.

“Kanna…!”

Hamin called my name and hunched his body. Since he couldn’t use both hands, he desperately tried to cling to my body, pushing me to the climax.

“Huh…”

I felt something rising inside me. Everything seemed to turn white.

“Ha, ha…”

Finally separated from his p*nis, I exhaled roughly and closed my eyes gently. Finally, it’s over.

Just as I thought that and relaxed my body, Hamin twitched and came closer.

“Ka, Kanna… I’m still hard.”

Huh, it’s not over…?

Ch. 161 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 161

I hugged Kanna.

Having only one hand made it quite uncomfortable to hold her and take the lead, but since I had been the one to whine and push for this, I thought I should at least try to guide things a little.

Everything was a first.

Kissing, inserting my tongue, pressing our bodies together like this.

Kanna also said it was her first time.

The bl**d was proof of that.

But when she asked me to put it in again, I felt like I was about to lose my sanity.

I focused on moving my hips.

The sensation was something I'd never felt before, and as if even the time to go to the convenience store to buy condoms was a waste, I pressed my body against hers, busy mixing our tongues.

By the end, it felt like Kanna's body was mine, and my semen filled her completely.

It was the moment of climax, and it was no different for Kanna.

As I ejaculated, my body instinctively curled up, as if it wanted to push in even more.

If I had two hands, I could have grabbed her waist and pulled her closer, but now I only had one hand.

If you asked whether one hand could pull someone close, the answer was no, so naturally, my body leaned into hers.

My body trembled.

I felt something hot being released from my waist.

It was ecstatic. I realized that humans were creatures capable of feeling this way.

Like this, like this…?

A tingling sensation made me shiver.

For some reason, a burning feeling gripped my member and wouldn’t let go.

The heat and tingling that I hadn’t felt until now seemed to pierce through my shaft.

A sudden memory came to mind.

Kanna had never properly used her ability, so she sometimes failed to control it.

It wasn’t an ability meant to cause pain, but from the moment that power weakly transferred from her body to mine, a strange sensation enveloped me.

I had no idea that the ecstasy I felt earlier would linger even more intensely.

“Huu…”

I didn’t want to look pathetic.

But Kanna’s insides, twitching and trying to scrape out the remaining semen, seemed to refuse to let go of my ability.

It took a long time to pull away.

I tried to calm myself with deep breaths.

I wondered if I had been too pushy, but I was so happy that Kanna had accepted me to this extent.

The corners of my lips seemed to rise on their own.

I’ll stop now and go to sleep. And from tomorrow, I’ll be more considerate so Kanna doesn’t feel too burdened.

But as soon as I thought that, I pulled out and realized I wasn’t going to go soft, breaking into a cold sweat.

No matter what, usually after pulling out, it would go soft quickly, giving me a chance to rest, but there was no sign of it subsiding.

Could it be because of Kanna’s ability stimulating me…?

What should I do in this situation? Would it go away if I received the same stimulation again?

I panicked. Knowing I couldn’t spend the whole day like this, I reluctantly grabbed my member and spoke to Kanna.

“Ka, Kanna… I’m still hard.”

My member, covered in a sticky mix of Kanna’s bl**d, fluids, and my semen, was still standing straight and firm.

Kanna, who had been looking at me with tired eyes, was startled by my words and sat up.

With her trembling body, she glanced at my member and then placed her hand on her lower abdomen.

“…Uh, um, what should we do…?”

When I begged, pleaded, or whined, Kanna never pushed me away or tried to distance herself, saying it was too much.

I was grateful, but I also felt guilty for taking advantage of it.

But now, solving this issue was the priority.

“Ah, if you give it the same stimulation inside, wouldn’t it work?”

“Uh, uh…”

Kanna seemed hesitant.

It hadn’t even been a day since she’d thought about it and done everything I asked, and now I was asking for more. I thought she might find me annoying.

I didn’t want to be hated in just one day.

Maybe I should solve this on my own.

As I seriously considered going to the bathroom to take care of it myself, Kanna let out a deep sigh.

The sound made my shoulders j*rk.

“…Sorry.”

“This is serious.”

I apologized, but Kanna, more concerned about my condition than accepting the apology, quietly approached me.

She covered her chest, which had been exposed by the shirt she'd hastily put on earlier.

Her panties, which had been pushed to the side, were leaking semen.

Watching it drip, I couldn't tell if my member wasn't going soft because of the stimulation or because I kept looking at Kanna.

I swallowed hard.

Kanna, unaware of my thoughts, reached out to my member.

She crawled closer, her face close, and poked it with her hand.

"Eek."

"Does it hurt?"

"…Not really, but ever since that tingling sensation when you were leaving, it's been like this."

"Tingling sensation…? Ah."

Kanna's expression turned serious, as if she'd realized something.

"Come to think of it, my unrefined magical power had built up a bit."

It was a power that couldn't be replenished, but once accumulated, it could be used continuously.

Though it was only possible within the barrier and limited to Kanna's body.

Kanna thought seriously for a moment, then pouted.

"…Tomorrow, you're definitely coming to the hospital with me."

"Uh, the hospital…?"

“Or go alone. For, you know, my birth control pills.”

Once I realized what Kanna was saying, my member ached.

It felt like it was going to burst. There must be a reason why it wouldn’t go soft even after ejaculating.

“Ugh,” I frowned and grabbed my member, making Kanna look at me in surprise.

“Ah, does it hurt?”

“It hurts… I think the bl**d’s all rushed there.”

“Ugh… I don’t know. Just, just for today.”

Kanna finally made up her mind, furrowed her brow, and stood up in front of me.

Her figure, wearing a half-sleeve shirt and panties, making it look like she wasn’t wearing bottoms, was illuminated by the faint moonlight.

Standing on the bed, she leaned forward, placed her hands on her pelvis, and slid her panties off.

After removing her damp panties, she placed them on the floor and slowly approached me.

Even with the cool air conditioner breeze, my body was filled with heat.

Despite the sweat cooling, before my body could grow cold, Kanna’s body pressed against mine.

“…With one hand, it’s hard, so I’ll do it…”

Kanna’s words were fragmented.

It seemed she was embarrassed to climb on top of me.

I sat on the bed, and Kanna sat on top of me.

I remembered how uncomfortable it was with only one hand. I thought it was something Kanna wouldn’t notice unless I mentioned it, but I didn’t expect her to be so considerate, which made me even more excited.

Kanna straddled my erect member.

I wanted to hug Kanna. I wanted to insert it.

I wanted to quickly relieve this bursting sensation and lie down comfortably.

“Ugh, ugh…”

Unlike before, instead of me inserting it, Kanna was the one swallowing it, and I lost control.

Perhaps because of that, Kanna’s effort to fully take it in with her own strength was captivating and alluring.

I swallowed hard.

I wanted to push Kanna down and move my hips right then and there.

But I didn’t want to ruin this moment, so I held back, waiting for Kanna to fully take it in.

Even though she didn’t take it all the way, I realized her insides were full, and I wrapped my right arm around her waist.

“Haa…”

Kanna closed her eyes tightly and let out a m*an.

I was at a loss for what to do with her.

As I wondered what I could do with Kanna sitting on top of me, she furrowed her brow.

Kanna’s hands gripped my shoulders.

Her legs went past me and wrapped around my waist.

Her legs, tightly wrapped around me as if she wouldn’t let go, made me feel even more connected to Kanna.

As I was lost in the sensation of my bursting member being gently yet tightly squeezed, Kanna bit her lower lip.

And soon after, her hips began to move.

I hadn’t tried to move, but her hips started moving first.

Kanna probably hadn’t planned to go this far, but since I had pushed her, she allowed it. But for her to move her hips on her own—was that even possible?

“…Kanna.”

“Don’t, misunderstand… It’s not that I want to, ugh, it’s just that I can’t sleep like this… So, hurry up, and let it go… Hng.”

I couldn’t stay still.

In the end, I held back, held back, and then couldn’t hold back anymore, forcing my body up.

As I rose, I leaned forward, pinning Kanna to the floor.

“Ugh, ah!”

Kanna was pinned underneath.

It was similar to the previous position, but it felt different.

Kanna’s hips arched, and I put my weight into thrusting.

I wanted to hold back, but I couldn’t. Just looking at Kanna made my member feel like it was going to burst, so I wanted to relieve it as quickly as possible and moved my hips.

Even a beast would have no words.

It went in deep.

The fluids inside Kanna and my member were scraped out and pushed back in repeatedly.

Squelch, squelch—there were many strange sounds, but what I heard most clearly was Kanna’s breathing.

“Stupid, deep, ah, haa!”

Our heads were almost touching, so her lewd voice came directly into my ears.

Her voice, mixed with moans and cries, made my actions rougher.

I thrust, and thrust again.

My member, swelling more and more, seemed determined to release all the semen I’d built up while watching Kanna.

“Kanna, Kanna, Kanna…!”

I surrendered to the sensation, pressing my face against Kanna’s and kissing her.

She tried to say something, but even her rough breaths were blocked by my mouth, and only moans filled the space.

And finally, the act intensified, and our bodies pressed together.

“Uuuuuh!”

Kanna’s legs wrapped around my waist, not letting go.

Even though I’d scraped out all the fluids inside Kanna with the tip of my member, I was pouring more semen into her.

And the semen that flowed back dripped from her slit onto her stomach.

“Haa, haa…”

I thought I’d be exhausted, but I wasn’t.

The stimulation I’d just experienced felt like encountering a new world, and the excitement didn’t end.

Because the love I could never tire of was right beside me.

“…Huu, haa.”

With my weight pressing down on her, Kanna’s eyes were half-open.

But it didn’t seem like she’d lost consciousness, as her unfocused eyes soon turned to me.

“…Is, is it, done…?”

Her slightly slurred speech was adorable.

But there was only one thing I could say to her.

“…No.”

“Aah…”

Kanna made a frustrated expression.

This time, too, the tingling sensation and heat that came when Kanna climaxed made my member stand firm again, and even after ejaculating and pulling out, it remained hard.

In the end, I had to keep mixing my body with Kanna until the erection subsided.

I had no idea it would last until dawn.

Ch. 162 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 162

A tangled head of hair and half-removed clothing. The emptiness left by the discarded underwear and the feeling of dried bodily fluids from having fallen asleep without showering made my groin itch.

I let out a gasp as I exhaled, rising my body and reminiscing about yesterday's memories as I watched Yoon Hamin, who was still sound asleep.

The recollections that came to mind were vague, and nothing vividly stood out, but I realized that, contrary to my plan which I had delayed, I had done everything that needed to be done.

If I woke up looking like this, it was stranger not to remember anything.

Hamin had been anxious, and I found out that my clinginess was a bid to alleviate that anxiety; coming to terms with that fact now filled me with self-loathing.

I sighed under the blanket, wondering how far I had allowed myself to go when I could have exercised more restraint.

"Ugh, ugh…"

Am I going crazy?

What does that mean, just this and only today? I had done everything possible in just that one day; does it even matter?

I had no intention of playing with Hamin’s feelings by testing and retreating, nor did I have any desire to leverage my body for a position of power over him.

Yet, against that thought, I had given in so easily last night. I had turned into a yes-man, nodding along to Hamin’s urging to alleviate his anxiety.

Am I just too easy…?

If someone else had asked, I wouldn’t have given in at all, but when Hamin pushed, it was hard to say no.

Every flicker of recollection flushed my face with heat. I covered my face with both hands under the blanket and, after feeling a void, cautiously moved my body.

“…This is driving me crazy.”

A single pair of panties lay awkwardly under the bed, symbolizing yesterday’s events. Unable to wear them, I swiftly picked them up and briskly walked out of the room.

Carrying the underwear into the bathroom, I began hand-washing from the crack of dawn.

Normally, I thought tossing everything in the washing machine was sufficient! But I couldn’t do that now, so I worked diligently by hand. Once I felt I had cleaned them well, I snuck out again and tossed the clothes from the laundry into the washing machine before showering.

Typically, I washed before going to bed, but washing in the morning felt oddly refreshing today.

The refreshing air that greeted the morning. Amidst that, the warm heat of summer approached.

I melted my body with warm water, washing away the bodily fluids that had stuck to me.

While I was engrossed in washing, a sudden loud voice reached my ears.

It sounded like Hamin was calling Kanna. I had rinsed my hair but wasn't completely done yet, so I wrung my hair out and tossed it back.

Then I flung the bathroom door open. Simultaneously, a very anxious Yoon Hamin burst into the changing room.

"Kanna!!"

"Uh."

Suddenly facing Yoon Hamin, especially when yesterday's events were still fresh, caught me off guard. I thought he called me and opened the bathroom door to find him standing there, which was even more confusing.

"Why so suddenly…"

"Kanna…!"

Not understanding why he was searching for me like that made my brows furrow instinctively. But Hamin had no time to answer such questions; he pushed through the door and stepped inside.

His footsteps, desperately calling my name, crossed the space between us and reached me.

"Uh, uh?!"

I was still in the middle of washing; wait a moment.

I wanted to say so much, but I was so surprised that only a flustered voice came out.

I hesitated, pulling back from the door, but Yoon Hamin stepped into the bathroom as if not letting me run away. I could hear the splashing sound as he pulled me close without considering how wet my body was.

Every night, I had held him tight while sleeping, and yesterday had gone beyond just holding; why was he coming to me first thing in the morning to hug me now?

As I felt both horrified and frozen, my body didn’t move. I sensed that Hamin’s mood was unusual, which made me want to understand what was happening.

“E-eh?”

Leaving my frozen voice behind, Yoon Hamin tightly hugged me with his remaining arm. Not long after, I heard a voice that sounded like he was about to cry.

“I thought you suddenly disappeared and left me…”

The startled emotion at that moment was accurately conveyed by his sad voice.

“…Why would I suddenly leave?”

I said that as I gently hugged Hamin and patted his back.

Washing while being too close would usually feel uncomfortable, but now, calming my shocked heart was my priority.

My breathing evened out. The startled feeling settled to a degree.

“Are you feeling calm now?”

“Yeah.”

“Then you should go outside for a bit. I was in the shower, remember?”

“Oh, sorry…”

After apologizing, Hamin seemed flustered and withdrew from me. He briefly scanned my body but turned away and stepped out of the bathroom without making any demands like yesterday.

Well, I’m not being cold. That’s a natural response.

After closing the bathroom door behind Hamin, I resumed my shower.

After finishing my shower, I dried my hair. Once I put on new clothes and draped a towel over my shoulder, I stepped outside to find Hamin clearly waiting for me.

“Were you waiting to shower?”

“No, not really… just waiting.”

“Then you won’t wash?”

“I have to, yeah.”

He nodded in response to my question and got up.

Having just finished the work yesterday, I immediately collapsed, and with needing to change the bedding too, I had no time to be leisurely.

Moreover, since Hamin currently had only one arm, that responsibility completely fell to me. There had been times I sat still while he did everything, but there was no hard and fast rule that we had to do that, so I planned to get things ready while Hamin was showering.

“Then I’ll shower.”

“Yeah, I’ll tidy up the blankets.”

As I said that, Hamin suddenly turned his head.

“No, I’ll arrange the bedding.”

“How can you manage the blankets when it’s uncomfortable? Just taking them out is something I can do, so there’s nothing for you to do.”

Hamin was quite stubborn. He had a character that wouldn’t bend to others as much as he was upright.

However, if there was a reason I could understand to some degree, he would adjust accordingly, so he wasn’t completely unyielding, and there were areas for compromise.

“Then later, could you get the medicine for me?”

“Ah… uh, okay.”

The moment medication was mentioned, Hamin froze and nodded with a stiffened voice.

Since I was going out anyways, I could also grab the medicine, and if there was nothing pressing, it wouldn’t hurt to look for the prosthetic arm as well, would it?

It didn’t make sense knowing there was a substitute and yet refusing to use it with only one arm being inconvenient for Hamin.

“And the prosthetic arm too.”

“…Got it, I’ll check on it.”

With a smile, he walked into the bathroom. I then turned my steps to tidy up the messy room.

*

Entering the changing room, I immediately covered my mouth and silently screamed.

As soon as I woke up in the morning, there was no one beside me. I was so startled that I shouted Kanna’s name right away and searched the room, growing more fearful each time I didn’t see her.

But when I opened the changing room door and realized that Kanna was in the bathroom, my heart calmed down. I felt like running over to hug her

without a thought.

The problem was that hugging her n*ked, later being aware of it, reminded me of yesterday's events, which made me feel like I was going crazy.

My face flushed. The moments spent sharing breaths and skin, mingling together lingered in my mind.

I need to cool my head with cold water. Yes, that's what I'll do.

I stepped inside and turned on the water. In this situation with only one hand, the shower holder felt very useful.

Splash!

Stepping out of the air-conditioned room, I was greeted with the heat.

The refreshing water began to rain down on my head and shoulders, quickly ventilating the feelings of warmth filling my body and heart.

I thought I would settle down somewhat, but whether it was from the coldness or the memories from yesterday flooding back, my heart throbbed.

I clenched my right hand tightly and placed it over my chest.

I really appreciated Kanna for listening to me so easily. Furthermore, her ability to seamlessly continue the conversation after hearing my honest feelings without awkwardness seemed genuinely beautiful.

But something even more intense lingered.

Her n*ked body that I had just seen earlier. My heart yearned deep down for another mixture of our bodies.

I regretted even mentioning "just today."

"This is driving me crazy."

I had been lowering my head, thinking it was getting strange, but now I lifted it again to cool down my head. The cold water splashed against my forehead.

If this could cool my head, it would be great.

Ch. 163 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 163

This evening was busy. Originally, it seemed I would have a relaxing day, but since Orca was coming over, I was busy tidying up and preparing everything.

My device is always turned off, but Hamin’s device had been boldly hospitalized and discharged after the fight, so he could turn it on comfortably.

In a situation where I did not know how the association planned to treat me, there was no way I could turn my device on.

It was a relief that they haven’t burst in, thinking I might be here at home.

I harbored the hope that it would be better to avoid offending Hamin, who had achieved such public recognition.

Still, I couldn’t be certain of anything. I could only wish for a favorable outcome.

“Kanna, sorry, could you help me with this?”

“Ah, just a moment.”

Since there were not many things Hamin could do alone, most of the tasks fell on me, and even when I found something I could do with one hand, preparing it was much easier if I handled it.

While I had a few more tasks to do, compared to what I received before, it was nothing, and since most expenses would come from Hamin’s wallet, I

wanted to be helpful in any way I could.

After finishing the cleaning, the time was approaching. Orca would be arriving soon.

Given what had happened last night, I was worried about whether I could manage my expressions when facing Orca.

Nothing happened. I just had to treat Orca as I normally would.

I hypnotized myself into believing nothing was wrong.

After a deep breath, I picked up the medication in my hand. As I filled a glass with water and took out the pills, I sensed Hamin stealthily approaching from behind.

“What’s up?”

I turned my head to ask, and Hamin stammered and mumbled.

“The doctor mentioned side effects, so I’m a bit anxious…”

“…Well, since this is the first time and just before meeting Orca, the side effects shouldn’t kick in immediately.”

After saying reassuring words to the anxious Hamin, I shook the pills into my hand. Then, tilting my head back, I swallowed the single pill along with the water.

If I had known this would happen, I should have bought some condoms. I had a fleeting thought, but I shook my head. At that time, I pushed myself because I was afraid my resolve would weaken, and I figured it wouldn’t matter going forward since there wouldn’t be anything left to do.

I wouldn’t be doing such things anymore.

As I set the empty glass down, just at the right timing, the doorbell rang.

“Uh, Orca must be here.”

At Hamin’s words, I quickly tidied up the trash and followed him.

I caught sight of Orca entering from the front door to the hallway.

“Hello.”

Standing awkwardly, she smiled and replied.

“Hello, Kanna. How have you been?”

“Yes, yes… I can’t move around comfortably yet, though.”

I smiled shyly and scratched my head, and Orca nodded as if she understood.

“Come in.”

“Is Hamin uncomfortable?”

“Ah, it’s a little uncomfortable, but I thought I’d check out a hospital today, so I went to one.”

Guided by Hamin, Orca entered the house and headed for the sofa in the living room.

The conversation, which had paused for a moment, resumed once all three of us were seated on the sofa. Hamin and I were on a large sofa, and Orca settled into a small sofa positioned at a right angle to Hamin.

“A hospital? For what?”

I couldn’t do anything about Hamin losing his arm. It was tough enough to connect a severed one, let alone create something from nothing.

Creating a prosthetic human body was bound to be a technical challenge.

So Orca seemed surprised by that reaction.

“I meant a prosthetic arm. Living with just one arm would be difficult, and if you’re going to have a prosthetic, it would be best if it could handle your abilities.”

“A prosthetic? There aren’t many that can withstand such abilities, and they would be too expensive to fully support, even for Academy students.”

“Is that so? I guess full support might be a bit much then.”

As Hamin pondered seriously, Orca began to think about Hamin’s words just as seriously.

“If it’s too burdensome, I can cover a portion on my side. If it’s still burdensome, payment in installments is fine too. I’ll wait for you.”

“Oh, really? Then please go with the latter. The price is ridiculous, and I’m not planning on gobbling it up.”

“Then it would be good to come to my house tomorrow, as I’ll be done early.”

The topic had shifted to prosthetics and suddenly, plans for tomorrow were being arranged swiftly.

I sat silently, having only offered greetings, alternating my gaze between the two.

Once the topic turned to Hamin’s arm, I had nothing to add amid the reports and discussions about potential support, which was only natural.

I had nothing to say. Should I make coffee?

As I thought, Orca’s gaze turned toward me.

“Kanna, have you been well? It’s only been two days, though.”

“Ah, yes.”

I stammered.

Did I have anything to talk about? I thought seriously, but when it came to life topics, I found myself lacking in what to say, with only embarrassing things I wanted to hide swirling in my mind.

No way I could mention what happened yesterday, no matter what.

As I hesitated, I concluded that if I lingered too much here, I could arouse more suspicion and decided to change the subject.

Since we had just been talking about Hamin’s arm, it wouldn’t be a stretch to relate to that.

Sorry, Hamin! But I had no choice!

Screaming internally, I managed to open my mouth.

“U-Um, of course. Since I’m doing various things in place of Hamin, I’m still not accustomed to it. Hehe.”

“Various things?”

“Cleaning and laundry are okay, but cooking is a bit difficult, I guess.”

As if she understood, Orca chuckled.

“That makes sense. Hamin, how is Kanna’s cooking?”

Oh, suddenly?

At Orca’s question, Hamin slightly turned his head and glanced at me.

It seemed he was looking for an objective assessment of my cooking.

The fact that I had to receive an evaluation of my cooking right then was surprising, but I was internally curious about Hamin’s reaction.

Without meaning to, I went along with the conversation instead of rejecting Orca's question.

"Y-Yeah. Just be honest."

"Uh, huh?"

I placed my firmly clenched fist on my knee and looked at Hamin.

Hamin, who was sitting to my right, flinched as if startled.

After a moment of silence, Hamin scratched his cheek with his available hand and gave his answer.

"It's good."

"…Well, since I just did what you told me to do, it's probably not bad."

I slumped my shoulders and leaned back against the sofa.

Then, as if I hadn't cared originally, I closed my eyes and exhaled.

Seeing that, Orca let out a small laugh.

"For someone who seemed so nervous, you look at ease now."

"No, no. That's just… if it wasn't good even after making an effort, I'd really have to quit cooking, you know…"

"Is that so?"

Orca continued speaking, smiling.

"I was worried that both of you might be having a tough time since Hamin lost his arm. Coming a day later was because I thought you both needed some time to get yourselves together, but I guess it was unnecessary worry."

Sitting across from Orca, I felt a useless sense of guilt.

Rather than having the time to collect my thoughts, I was busy accepting Hamin’s emotions.

Even more so, those feelings hadn’t diluted even after a day had passed, overwhelming me with an intensity I had never experienced before, which was also frightening.

Having spent a day that I couldn’t put into words, I realized this was a secret I had to bury deep.

I just had to keep quiet and not show it, but I felt increasingly anxious, with my lips getting dry.

“…Well, now that you’re here, would you like to have dinner? I’ll cook. I learned how.”

“Do you often cook, Kanna?”

“No?”

“Then when you lived separately, did you just eat out…?”

“Yes, yes, just as you see.”

When I mentioned that I had said I would tell where Hamin’s hospital was, I recalled the time I ran into Hamin while buying preserved foods at a convenience store.

Orca nodded as if she understood.

If you had money, you could cook as much as you wanted, but when you had very little money, even cooking became a luxury.

It didn’t make sense to buy rice to prepare for an uncertain tomorrow, nor to buy food in bulk.

“What do you want to eat? I can make risotto and I can also make pasta.”

“Then I’d like pasta, please. Oh, what kind of pasta?”

“…Tomato pasta.”

“Okay, that sounds good.”

I worried about whether the type of pasta would be to her liking, but it seemed unnecessary to fret about that.

And upon hearing that answer, Hamin pointed toward the kitchen.

“There’s a wrapped tomato can over there.”

“Oh, so I was supposed to make the sauce first?”

“Yeah, but?”

Watching Orca’s surprised reaction to Hamin’s words, it seemed she was used to just making it with store-bought sauce.

Honestly, I had expected Hamin to use store-bought sauce when he made pasta, but it had surprised me when he didn’t.

Even though I vaguely knew that, experiencing it in person was a whole different matter.

I easily understood Orca’s feelings as those were the same feelings I had first experienced.

“Then, I’ll be right back.”

I said that and headed for the kitchen.

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“Oh, it’s delicious. Yoon Hamin told you the recipe, right?”

“Yes…! I’m glad it suits my taste.”

I felt a sense of pride.

If Orca had just said it was okay in a soulless voice, I would have thought it was out of consideration for me to make just enough for myself, but knowing that she wasn’t completely talentless reassured me.

Even though I had a recipe, if I couldn’t follow it properly, there was no way out except for rigorous training or giving up.

Thank goodness. I’m happy that Orca says it’s tasty.

As the corners of my lips curled up, Orca carefully set down her fork and changed the subject.

“Then I’ll pick you up on the way home from school tomorrow. If Kanna is okay with it, she can come along too.”

“Oh, then… can I go?”

“Of course. I should treat you tomorrow. I won’t be the one making it, though.”

I wondered if this was a time to find out what Orca usually eats.

I felt a little excited.

Eating something delicious was one of the few joys I had left.

“By the way, Yoon Hamin.”

“Yes?”

“What are you thinking about the prosthetic arm? Just enough to hold strength?”

Orca tried to gauge Yoon Hamin’s strength.

It was difficult to assess Yoon Hamin’s strength.

What was visible right now was already powerful, and the level of potential overflowing meant he could become stronger at any time and possibly become incomparable to other heroes later on.

I stopped calculating whether Orca knew that or if even the visible strength was difficult to gauge.

“Well, just that much would be lucky. If there are too many options, I might not be able to handle it.”

“Is that right? That could be. Then we should start searching for such metal. Making it can come later. For now, let’s just think of it as taking measurements tomorrow.”

“Okay, thank you.”

Orca calmly replied, “You’re welcome.”

For some reason, her demeanor gave off an aura that made it feel like this was something I should do as a matter of course, which was strange.

“Aside from that, there are unusual businesses going on in my family. You know about Yoon Hamin and Kanna, right? Humanity has no means to

leave the Barrier at all.”

“Business?”

“I know.”

I thought that I wasn’t the one to bring this topic up, so I just played along.

Orca took out a device from her school uniform pocket, glanced at something for a moment, then sighed deeply.

“…It seems that one of the council members is promoting a project to construct an underground city.”

“What underground city construction?”

I felt an illusion of a question mark hovering over Hamin’s head.

Moreover, I had never heard of this before, so I involuntarily tilted my head.

As if she anticipated my question, Orca continued smoothly.

“The Veil takes a hemispherical shape centered on the Central. It’s not that they want to make it in a hemispherical shape; it looks like a hemisphere because it’s a sphere but appears that way due to the ground.”

Orca tapped the table lightly with her finger.

“Since we can’t leave the Barrier anyway, they must have judged that it’s better to dig underground than give up on expanding the land. I don’t know whether it’s a choice caused by the increase in humanity or some kind of large-scale bunker, but I don’t have the exact purpose.”

“Even though they are currently repairing the Barrier, where will the money come from?”

Hamin asked seriously.

“It seems that the council member is covering it directly. It’s an amount that’s too difficult to manage with taxes. It’s not like they are trying to build a building that already has an underground; it’s a complicated matter to dig underground beneath an already completed city.”

Council member, huh.

Among the six council members, there was only one person who could do such a thing.

Well, knowing this wouldn’t change anything, so there was no reason for me to mention it.

Since it was something that the Lamiris family, to which Orca belonged, had to handle, I listened to the conversation as a bystander.

“If this project proceeds, and if it starts properly, and if humanity manages to endure the invasion from monsters until then, will we be able to survive if we can migrate there?”

Orca posed the question.

“I wanted to ask this.”

Her gaze was directed not at Yoon Hamin but at me.

“What do you think, Kanna? You’re good at looking ahead.”

She was asking seriously.

It wasn’t unjustified to be worried, but it seemed the purpose was indeed this way.

“…Even if I’m good at it…”

Most events had slipped out of my hands by now.

The underground city construction project was a story I was hearing for the first time.

After all, events didn’t occur very frequently until Yoon Hamin turned third year, so I might not have felt any sense of crisis.

Because of that, I might not have even thought of such a project.

This project was conceived to escape the invasions that happened frequently within a short time.

Humanity would abandon the land and flee underground.

Of course, if the surface was completely occupied by monsters, the humanity hiding underground could be buried alive as a whole, so there would have to be at least a minimal number of people—those called heroes—who would protect the Barrier, but we wouldn’t be able to escape the fact that we were fleeing.

“……”

I tried to avoid answering because it was burdensome, but since it seemed that Orca had come to seek an answer from me, I concluded that I couldn’t just avoid it.

“Probably, it won’t be possible. It might be better to invest in other places rather than investing money there.”

I answered honestly.

Someone else might say I was being overly dramatic or too blunt.

Moreover, I couldn’t avoid being seen as overly negative.

However, Orca took it seriously.

It wasn’t excessive at all, and she didn’t dismiss it as just being negative.

“Is that related to what you mentioned before about destruction?… Well, maybe the business period is a little long, so it can’t be helped.”

I nodded.

If I had known that such conversations would happen from the beginning, I might have given what I could and hoped that the project would be completed while Yoon Hamin was a third year.

If I had been able to buy even a little more time, perhaps this fate could have changed a little.

Regret and lingering feelings seemed to intersect.

Just because I had regret and lingering feelings didn’t mean I would be given another chance to choose, so I repeated deep breathing to clear my mind.

Huh, ha, huh, ha.

“So what do you think we should do? Even if I am the heir, I’m not the head of the family, so my voice isn’t very strong.”

“I don’t really know. I don’t even know how it works… It might just be okay to leave it as is.”

If the council had made a choice, there would surely be reasonable grounds for it, and they’d have that much stubbornness.

While they might easily back down, they wouldn’t listen to Orca’s weak voice until those grounds were denied.

So now, just sitting back and watching seemed to be the best option.

“Just leave it alone?”

“Yes, well. It would be nice if they’d listen to what I say, but if not, it’s

better to just leave it be. Before the monsters rush in, it might not matter as it’s the council member’s personal asset.”

I calculated in my head.

“And if humanity can’t go outside the Barrier anyway, they will have to choose one of the two options: either to go up or to dig down. It would be nice to replace the low buildings near the Barrier with apartments, but for now, it’s more sensible to spend more money on the underground since we see it as safer than the surface.”

As I spoke, Orca nodded.

“That makes sense. Since the monsters will eventually come, it’s best to think ahead… Um, I’m really glad I came and asked.”

“…Don’t you think that too, Orca?”

“That’s true, but I wanted to hear Kanna’s opinion.”

Feeling that made me shy but also happy.

It meant that Orca believed in what I said.

“Well, now that we’ve finished eating, should we clean up?”

“Ah, I’ll do it.”

As Orca stood up with the dishes clattering, Yoon Hamin also tried to get up and help.

“Just relax; you don’t have an arm. Even though you’re a guest, you’re still a friend, so it’s okay.”

But she naturally declined Hamin’s offer and showed consideration.

“I can do it all myself.”

“No, Kanna. I’ll clean my own dishes.”

With a soft voice, Orca held the dishes in her hand and slightly turned her head towards the kitchen.

I stared at her for a moment in a daze, then looked over at Hamin who was beside me.

“…Give it here.”

“I can do it myself…”

“Go rest on the sofa.”

“I’m sorry.”

“What’s there to be sorry about? It’s fine.”

I said that while grabbing the dishes from her as if taking them.

After leaving Hamin behind and putting all the chairs back in place, I headed to the sink, where Orca had already placed the dishes in the sink and was looking for the trash can.

“Kanna, do you know where the trash can is? I want to throw away the paper I used earlier.”

“Just give it to me.”

“No, it’s the one I wiped my mouth with…”

“Really? It’s over there in the corner.”

Even though Orca could be called a rich lady, she was a diligent person who didn’t pass her tasks onto others.

Competition was merely a source of energy for her, so the feeling that she had to accomplish something really resonated with me.

After indicating where the trash can was, I picked up the scrubbing brush to do the dishes.

If I put this off after every meal, it would feel like too much, so even though it was a hassle, I preferred to do it in advance for my mental health.

“Hey, Kanna.”

“Yes? Ah, I’ll do this. It’s faster when I’m alone…”

I was startled, thinking that she was suggesting I do the dishes after eating, but I realized that wasn’t the case at all.

Orca had hurriedly picked up a box that she had just cleaned.

“What is this…?”

Uh.

My head went blank, and I couldn’t say anything.

The sound of water pouring filled the silence.

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There was a moment when I suddenly felt like this. When something I didn’t want to be discovered was revealed, and my heart felt like it was tightening.

It must have felt like this when someone gets caught in a lie.

I became restless, my mouth went dry, and my hands couldn’t remain still.

As I hesitated and took a step back, Orca was holding the box I had discarded earlier, pointed straight at me.

The large letters that read “Emergency Birth Control Pill” pushed me into an inescapable situation, and it seemed Orca reached out as if to say that escaping from that situation wasn’t possible.

As I stood there, unable to say anything and with my head bowed low, Orca let out a deep sigh and tossed the box back into the trash can.

“Well, I don’t intend to pry too deeply into someone else’s private life.”

At those words, I involuntarily lifted my head.

Her blonde hair and striking blue eyes caught my attention.

She shook her hands and gazed at me intently.

“But considering you’re using something like this, it can’t be good for your health, so please don’t rely on medication next time.”

“…Yes.”

I felt embarrassed.

I thought once would be enough, and I never imagined I’d be caught right on that first time.

The one occasion I decided not to disclose out of necessity, regarding my s*xual life, was now wholly known by Orca, leaving me at a loss for words.

My face became too hot.

Orca seemed concerned about my reaction and gently took my hand.

Though startled, her soft grip felt like she wasn’t going to let go.

“…Kanna, I’m going to ask you something seriously.”

“Y-yes…”

“Is it true that next time, everyone is going to perish? Will all the people behind this barrier d*e? Is that why you allowed Yoon Hamin like this?”

“Huh?”

I couldn’t select a suitable answer in an instant.

Despite showing that I wouldn’t involve myself in s*xual matters, I was now being questioned about the foundation for allowing that body to Yoon Hamin.

Although it wasn’t about a s*xual matter, linking the two felt shameful, as though it were somehow related.

For a moment, I groaned, recalling the sensations I felt when I permitted my body to Yoon Hamin yesterday.

After a short while, I replied with a somewhat stiff voice.

“…Yes.”

“Um, could you tell me how you perceive it? Perhaps the timing… you were able to do it before, right?”

“I don’t know now.”

I wanted to say something nice to Orca.

There was also a desire to meet her expectations.

But how could I answer something I didn’t know?

Pretending to know something when I didn’t was nothing but deception.

Moreover, there was no reason to lie about a matter concerning the fate of humanity living within this barrier.

“But the next time a monster attacks will be just before our demise.”

I said that while placing my hand on the sink.

I gripped it tightly.

I wanted to live each day like it was nothing, yet I feared that if things remained peaceful, I might end up panicking over this, and later, if Yoon Hamin forgets our agreement and approaches me again, that would be troublesome. I wanted to return to the academy and study diligently, but that seemed impossible now.

Even if I spent a day as if nothing was wrong, I could not erase the lurking anxiety behind it.

We weren’t the only ones worrying about when the barrier would fall.

Those living near the barrier, and those around the academy were also

concerned whether it would be them next, fearing silently and struggling to sleep.

“To be honest, even if I get a prosthetic arm, I’m not sure it would help. No matter how good a prosthetic is, an Awakened One’s superior human body is always better, so what can a prosthetic arm withstand?”

“I heard that Yoon Hamin forced a monster into a corner, but is that no longer possible now?”

“I don’t know. It depends on the opponent.”

There were too many variables.

If someone suddenly asked about this child’s future profession, even someone who could predict the future would reach a limit trying to answer it.

Still, one could say it was fortunate there were a certain number of options here, but one might also have to admit that it was that very uncertainty that bred fear.

“If someone reinforces their abilities to that degree, then next time it will be hard for Hamin to approach a monster. Even if he does, it might not even end with just an arm. Getting a prosthetic doesn’t guarantee anything. It simply becomes a consolation, a one-armed person trying to feel secure.”

I wrapped my right arm around my left arm, which was gripping the sink.

“Moreover, another monster will come next.”

“Is it the one that previously consumed Yoon Hamin’s abilities?”

“No, that one isn’t very threatening. An actual monster with the power to bring humanity to its knees will come.”

“Is there really such a monster?”

“There is.”

I could answer that confidently.

“A large monster can be taken down with a single punch, and this barrier can also be torn down without the help of a totem, so it wouldn’t be too much to call it the strongest, right?”

“If such a monster exists… can Yoon Hamin respond? Kanna, you talked about hope regarding Yoon Hamin that way. If that’s the case, isn’t destruction impossible?”

That’s something possible only when Yoon Hamin in his third year, having become stronger, would burn himself to shed light on his surroundings.

Right now, everything was racing in a way I couldn’t control.

If Habar charges in without Yoon Hamin being able to surpass the strength I knew of in his third year, you could reasonably conclude victory would be out of reach.

“We need to get stronger. Right now, I’m merely anxious and desperately turning my gaze away. Even if a prosthetic arm is attached, I would have to relearn how to fight wholeheartedly and strengthen myself. That would be good, but at the moment, it seems difficult.”

At my words, Orca’s shoulders drooped.

“So Kanna is predicting destruction.”

“That’s right. It’s actually the truth.”

“Aren’t you anxious? I’m asking because I want to hear it, but you already know it. Are you not afraid? To know the future that you never wished to know.”

Yet, her gaze was fixed firmly on me.

“Were you hoping to dispel Yoon Hamin’s anxiety? While you’re likely the more anxious one.”

Those words struck a chord, leaving me speechless.

The corners of my lips twitched. I pulled them up with great effort, as if trying to prevent them from falling down.

My lips, aligned horizontally, couldn’t voice a single word.

“You haven’t accepted d*ath, have you? Please tell me. If it’s hopeless for Yoon Hamin, let me know. I will do what I can to help. If fighting is necessary, I will fight. I won’t hide just because I’m the heir to my family…”

I felt determination.

Seeing Orca’s fist tremble was enough to know she was serious.

“Should I learn magic? Now that classes are gradually reducing, there will be more time to study.”

“No, you don’t need to learn magic.”

That was said with Rendel in mind.

But at this moment, it hardly mattered.

Still, I felt grateful she reminded me of what I had said in the confusion before.

“Magic is unnecessary… um.”

“What is it?”

“Actually, I’m not sure if this is alright, but Orca’s ability is related to the earth, right?”

Orca nodded at my words.

“I think it would be good if we could separate the monsters if possible. Then quickly dealing with the monsters controlling others would be the most ideal approach.”

“If that’s the ideal way, does that mean it’s difficult?”

“Yes. It will be difficult. The monsters break through the barrier with sheer force, so unless Orca makes it thick and solid, they would break through quickly.”

I raised my finger and tapped on the sink area.

“What the monster prioritizes is crucial. Whether it prioritizes the monster that deals with the monster called Reika, or whether it’s focused on killing the people in front of it. If it’s the former, things will probably become difficult. Even the latter is just a matter of time, so it would be equally challenging. If Hamin can’t manage on his own, he will need help, but I can’t guarantee that, based on what I know.”

I spoke honestly.

The anxiety wouldn’t disappear.

Even if one changes their demeanor and tries to live peacefully, reality always approaches.

Whether yesterday or today, we pretended to regain new peace, yet turning a blind eye didn’t change anything.

“I’m sorry for only sharing unpleasant stories. And… thank you for your concern.”

“…It’s alright. I feel like I might be asking too deeply. I’m sorry.”

“No, no. Uh, in any case, I brought this up because of our discussion, didn’t I?”

I raised my hand and waved it dismissively.

Only then did Orca manage to relax her guilty expression.

“Ah, that’s good to hear. Anyway, relying too much on pills like these… can cause various health issues, so be careful taking them.”

“Ah, no, I won’t take them anymore, so it’s fine.”

“…….”

“Please don’t look at me like that…”

The problem was being found out about the post-coital contraceptive.

It was almost like the situation was revealing itself without needing to ask how it felt.

Once again feeling shy under her gaze, I bowed my head and completely turned my body towards the sink.

If I just do the dishes like this, maybe Orca would leave quickly…

Thinking that, I put soap on the scrubber and began diligently washing the dishes.

Ch. 166 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 166

Several days had passed since Orca had returned. I had stopped by her mansion once, but there was nothing significant to say, and my business ended rather blandly; Yoon Hamin was waiting for his prosthetic arm to be made.

As I had told Orca, just because a prosthetic arm was being made didn't mean that the anxieties he had would magically disappear.

The current circumstances were consuming Hamin's strength, and even if he got the prosthetic, he could still face the same situation, and the thought of potentially losing even more was among the things I didn't want to imagine.

But I didn't say any of this to Hamin.

There was no reason to dampen his spirit, so it was my job to spend each day quietly like this.

The only thing I could do now was to cheer him on as he worked hard and encourage him when he felt anxious.

Friday night.

I was blankly staring at the TV screen. Hamin, who was next to me, softly spoke while keeping his eyes fixed on the television.

"…Kanna."

"Yeah?"

“Do you think I can do it?”

“Do what?”

“Fight the monster and win. I’m a little worried if I could defeat someone who can tear the barrier with strength.”

And today, it seemed Hamin was particularly worried.

When he went to Orca’s house to get measured for the prosthetic, it looked like the thoughts about the monster had rekindled his fear.

The creature that could wield monsters as if it were nothing, Reika, was the biggest problem. She was the root cause of it all.

Rendel, who could seal abilities by designating a person, was relatively weaker so a human could easily defeat him.

And while Habar was not particularly dangerous in terms of ideology, he was overwhelming, like a runaway locomotive that couldn’t be stopped once it started.

It was only natural that there were no humans who could tear down both the veil and the barrier at once, no matter how strong their abilities were.

“If you work hard, you can win.”

I calmly replied. There was no reason for me to join in his worries by saying, “Really?”

Hamin seemed to find my answer a bit ambiguous, staring quietly at the TV without any reaction.

Beyond it, heroes were gradually regaining consciousness, completing treatment, and returning to their agencies.

“Are you anxious?”

When I asked, Yoon Hamin glanced back at me.

“…No, I have to work hard.”

“Sorry if I’m pushing you too much. Um…”

The words rose to my throat.

“I won’t force you to fight since you’re an academy student. If you’re too scared, you don’t have to fight.”

I wondered how long it had taken me to say such things.

How many times had I pressed Hamin and how much time had I taken to push him into a corner?

While it might sound nice that it was for humanity, and for Hamin, what I was doing was merely cornering him. It was akin to threatening him about the future.

Hero Yoon Hamin would surely be sad if humanity perished, or if those around him disappeared, and I had said this to prevent that, but if it didn’t resonate with him genuinely, it would just feel like a threat.

So, this was the first time I said something like this.

Telling him he didn’t have to try hard.

“Well then, what about Kanna? I have to fight hard so that Kanna can be recognized, too.”

“Recognized?”

“…I want to make sure that others don’t say anything bad about you.”

Hamin clenched his fist. Then he slowly opened it again, and that hand reached towards me.

A soft warmth lightly covered my hand.

“No matter how many sacrifices it takes, I want to protect you.”

“…Thank you.”

For being a star in the dark night sky.

What I do for myself will soon be for humanity as well.

Even if it shines for me, in the end, it will shine for everyone.

People will be saved because of that.

“If Kanna hadn’t been there, I would have really struggled. I wouldn’t have been able to endure it alone when something like this happened. My ability wouldn’t have returned either.”

No, if I hadn’t been there, the one losing their ability first would have been Orca.

“And you’ve saved quite a few people, haven’t you? The new monster, too…”

No, with one hasty move, I had completely failed to predict the next incident.

In fact, I should have either let go of some things while not changing the course of events or taken some things while letting go of others.

“And even though it seems like you would want to give up because it’s so painful, you’re still caring for other people. I feel like I’m saved by that heart.”

No. If that’s the case, you would be sad.

If you do that, it seems like you would feel pain, too…

“The night cannot be avoided. Heroes try to become beings like stars for such people. My ability is a star, but in a broader sense, other heroes are

also stars, aren’t they?”

He seemed a bit embarrassed to be saying such things, smiling bitterly.

“Nevertheless, the night is not eternal.”

Hamin’s right hand, which was overlaid on mine, tightened its grip.

A steady pressure conveyed through my hand.

“Yeah, you are like the sun to me; I couldn’t let you go. I sometimes think it would be fine even if I couldn’t shine as long as you were here.”

“…….”

“I think being able to care for others even after feeling so much pain is what makes a true hero.”

“Stop with the embarrassing talk.”

I pulled my hand away.

“I’m not a hero or anything.”

“Not in the professional sense of ‘hero.’ I already think you’re quite enough of a hero.”

I fell silent.

“I’m sorry for saying strange things repeatedly. I think I want to get through this by working hard, but thinking that I might d*e makes me emotional.”

“…That’s understandable.”

It was unavoidable for someone faced with d*ath to become emotional.

I felt a little wrong for saying it like that.

After slightly moistening my dry lips, I swallowed hard.

“W-what is it?”

As I tried to control my emotions, I felt something odd in my hair and turned my head to find his free right hand gently touching my hair.

“I thought it was pretty.”

“…What are you saying?”

When I suddenly turned my head, he let my hair fall like strands.

“I like this hair. It’s like morning sunlight.”

His body leaned a bit closer.

“It feels nice to be next to you.”

It felt as though that moment was approaching again.

Before, I thought I could willingly accept such awkwardness, but now that I was thrust into the situation, I was left speechless.

The moment Yoon Hamin, who was more afraid of parting than d*ath, acted like a child.

“…I like you.”

Before I knew it, my feelings shifted from fear and worry to liking him.

It was a sudden change that I couldn’t adapt to.

How much and what exactly did he like?

It seems like a declaration of love after rambling about cringe-worthy things would imply an equivalent liking, but having been through so much, that would be out of the question.

Hamin, who had subtly embraced me from the side, was breathing against my hair.

We used the same shampoo and conditioner, so I didn’t quite understand why he was taking deep breaths.

“Please don’t d*e, Kanna.”

“…Worry about yourself first. I’ll be safe.”

“Yeah, that’s true.”

Hamin chuckled nervously.

One arm awkwardly wrapped around my upper body, refusing to let go.

“I like you, …Kanna.”

“I like you too.”

I responded somewhat casually, giving him just the right amount of encouragement.

I didn’t mean that I disliked him, but I also didn’t feel like reciprocating with excessive enthusiasm like a wagging tail.

If I went too far, I was afraid I would get swept along with the atmosphere again, so I wanted to avoid that.

“Could I at least get a kiss…?”

“No. I’m not in the mood for that today.”

“…I’m sorry.”

“…….”

He made a voice that sounded like a drooping puppy. I felt like I had done something wrong.

I sighed.

Hamin’s grip loosened, allowing me to slip away from the sofa, but his expression didn’t look very good.

“Um, because of the medicine I took earlier, my condition was off until yesterday.”

“I’m sorry, I really didn’t know. Ah, I said I wouldn’t, but I’m really sorry.”

Seeing Hamin’s truly regretful expression made me let out a long sigh.

Sighing, well, even if we made a promise, a teenage boy’s s*xual desire wouldn’t just disappear for a day.

Orca already knew everything, and if I continued this lifestyle, I felt like I wouldn’t be able to look Orca in the eye.

“We agreed to only do it that day, and we did enough, so let’s hold out a bit longer.”

“…Okay.”

Hamin nodded his head.

Seeing that, I sighed repeatedly.

*

Working at a convenience store was always boring.

It might vary by time, but since a young man had the night shift until morning, it became inevitable to be dull and tedious.

With not many customers coming and going, it had naturally become his responsibility to clean, change price tags, or organize the goods that arrived.

There was no leeway to do such things during peak hours for customers, so it was somewhat forced, but conversely, it was fortunate to be doing such work during quiet times.

Sitting idle was also painfully boring.

Ding.

Even past midnight, a few customers would come in. Today too, it seemed one of those rare customers had arrived.

Her ivory hair was a bit disheveled, and her violet eyes seemed to tremble with anxiety.

“…Welcome?”

The young man wore a somewhat hesitant greeting.

Despite the common color, there was something about that hair color that stood out, making it difficult to avert my eyes.

Since Kanna, who could only come out at times like these, had decided to come instead of Hamin, she still felt no relief when it came to buying condoms.

She held back the feeling like her face was about to burst and opened her mouth.

“Um, excuse me, where are the condoms?”

“They’re over there on the corner display…”

“Ah, I’m sorry…”

Kanna, with her head bowed low, went to the display and returned with two boxes of condoms.

Placing them down on the counter, she cautiously pulled out the card she received from Hamin.

“Uh, um, would you like a bag?”

“Ah, no… I’ll use them right away…”

Kanna accepted the card after completing the transaction and dashed out, hugging the condoms close to her chest.

The young man stared blankly at the door Kanna had just opened.

Ch. 167 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 167

I had vowed not to do it. I thought one act would be enough, just for a day.

So I had firmly said it couldn’t happen, but Yoon Hamin came over the line subtly, claiming he understood. However, when he stuck close to me, expressing his affection like this, I felt guilty pushing him away.

I liked having him next to me, but I wasn’t sure if I liked the act. It felt like my mind was going blank, and I couldn’t think at all, which wasn’t a particularly good memory.

Maybe it was because it was my first time, but it seemed the throbbing was more intense. Besides, since I was already running around a lot, I was sure I’d get exhausted and collapse.

I wanted to postpone it, but seeing Hamin looking dejected, and then unable to resist, he pulled me in and wiggled his fingers, made me feel a sigh escape.

“I, brought it.”

Just once, I would close my eyes for this one time.

“…Uh huh.”

When I went to buy the condom separately, Hamin seemed dazed as he blankly stared at the box I presented.

“You said you wanted to do it, right?”

“But Kanna, you said you didn’t like it…”

What is he talking about? Even after saying that, he still clung to me, right? It was pitiful, and honestly, I wanted to see more of Hamin’s happy face, so I just let it slide.

I told myself that inwardly, but I didn’t want to pass this with the excuse that I was being considerate in this situation, so I hesitated.

“I don’t hate it that much… I’m just embarrassed…”

I answered with my lips pouting and avoided his gaze. I lowered my head slightly, worried that I might have an odd expression.

Whether he knew or not, Yoon Hamin was busy looking at the box with a groan.

“Kanna…”

He called me in a voice that seemed filled with emotion.

But that feeling quickly changed to awkwardness.

“But I’ve never learned how to put it on…”

“I don’t know either.”

You should have at least tried it once. You should have seen someone do it.

“Then should I search my way…?”

In the meantime, Hamin seemed to be enjoying it, his lips twitching as he started touching the screen.

He seemed to like the fact that this was possible even if it was difficult or awkward.

Should I say he was full of youthful vigor? I wasn’t sure, but seeing Hamin happy made me feel oddly proud.

If Hamin’s reaction had been mediocre, I would have regretted buying condoms in the middle of the night later on.

“…I’m stuck from the start.”

“Why?”

“They said you have to squeeze the air out before putting it on, but it’s hard to do it with one hand.”

A sigh escaped deeply.

“Let me see.”

Leaning forward, I looked at the screen Hamin was staring at, and the steps were detailed in there. Although it wasn’t complicated or extensive, Hamin, who was missing one arm, found it challenging.

There probably wasn’t a condom that could be put on with one hand, but maybe he could manage it alone later once he became skilled?

Of course, getting to that point would require countless trial and error, but that was a sacrifice I was willing to make.

I reached out my hand to him.

“Give it to me.”

I extended my hand towards the condom box in front of Hamin.

At that, Hamin, who was focused on the device, let out a surprised, “Ah.”

Ignoring that voice, I pulled out a piece of content from inside.

*

There was a lot of information available on the device. Among it was how to put on a condom, but the problem was I couldn’t follow it.

You just twist it to squeeze the air out and put it on, but that was impossible with one hand.

No, there must be someone somewhere who could do it skillfully with one hand. But I was not that someone.

It wasn’t my first time having s*x, but it was my first time with a condom.

Of course, this was something I could do because Kanna had allowed it, but I wanted to avoid situations where taking emergency contraception might lead to side effects like vomiting or diarrhea or, worse, problems with the uterus.

I thought it was better for Kanna’s body too, even though that contradicts the sensations we could feel.

As I groaned and thought about what to do, Kanna suddenly leaned over and grabbed the condom box I’d put down in front of me.

“Give it to me.”

I couldn’t react since I was holding the device with one hand.

“…Wait a minute, shouldn’t you be erect first?”

“Uh, right.”

I didn’t plan to say much. I was waiting, thinking Kanna would have ideas, but another problem arose.

Kanna said she wanted some fresh air for a bit, and I was anxious thinking that at midnight it would be okay, but the issue was that I had lost my erection during that time alone.

While the mood could easily get me erect, the problem was it took a bit to get it back up once it had gone down.

I knew how to solve it well, but…

“Then should we start with the mood…?”

Before I could even say that, Kanna took the initiative. She gently set the condom package aside without tearing it and came closer to me.

“……”

Since Kanna usually took a passive role, I sometimes wondered if it was only me who benefited, as she mostly accepted my demands.

In fact, before this situation arose, my requests and pouting had usually played most of the roles.

I felt sorry for her too. It seemed like I was pushing her to do something she didn’t want to.

Even though I knew that, I couldn’t correct it because it was my greed and selfishness.

Feeling anxious about wanting to experience more with Kanna, wanting to know everything about her and clinging to her seemed to play a part.

But in this moment, I was grateful for Kanna’s initiative. Was it because I was being stubborn, and she wanted it to end quickly?

But…

“By the way, Kanna, I’m curious about something.”

“Hmm?”

“Why did you buy two packs?”

“…Well, I thought you’d want to do it a lot, so…”

Kanna replied casually.

It wasn’t like Kanna was trying to set the mood, but my heart started racing.

“I see.”

I put the device down and picked up one of the boxes lying beneath. Two packs contained six condoms, which meant at least Kanna was willing to have six times with me, making me gulp.

“What are you doing? Use the box I opened first.”

“Uh, okay…”

“Is this how we do it…?”

As I set the box down, Kanna gradually approached me and pressed her lips against mine.

Since it wasn’t in a dark state as before, I could clearly see Kanna’s flushed face.

Her trembling pupils reflected her inner feelings.

Her reluctant gaze met mine for a moment before darting away to another spot.

Then she lowered her head again, hesitating on where to put her wandering hands.

I loved her so much, found her adorable, and desperately wished I had another arm.

Even if I had another arm, nothing would dramatically change. I could only better balance during a fight and could switch weapons, achieving those small but crucial tasks.

I knew that even if I had a splendid prosthetic arm, it wouldn’t grant me enough power to change the fate of the world.

I just wanted a prosthetic arm because I wanted to embrace Kanna with both hands. To create an illusion that we had become one, to frown together

when we felt pain.

Would we be alive in the future?

Kanna, could you and I be together?

If only one of us survived, it would be hell, right?

Even if both of us died, that would be the worst.

Before that, I wanted to hold her.

No matter how many times we kissed or how much we intertwined our bodies, it felt insufficient.

I just wanted to embrace her with all my strength.

“Wouldn’t it be nice if we did it like this?”

I want to embrace you without regret.

I want to remember this warmth.

You shine brighter than any beam of light I can emit, hotter than any explosion I can create.

As the morning began to rise, a gentle smile greeted me.

Her soft hair danced, as if announcing that dawn had broken, tickling my ears.

The amethyst-glowing eyes, signaling the departure of night, reflected me.

It felt like I was inside another world.

What I had longed for. What I had desperately sought.

More necessary than the stars in the night sky for people right now.

“Wouldn’t it be nice if we did it like this?”

“…Mmm.”

As I leaned in to kiss her deeply, Kanna let out a subtle groan.

A light peck didn’t excite me at all.

It didn’t provide a strong enough stimulus to my already pounding heart.

So I completely held my breath.

I felt like I would demand the breath she held if I ran out of air.

“Mmmm…”

A cute voice slipped out.

I savored that voice while gently pulling Kanna a little closer.

And as our mouths gradually opened, our tongues came out to explore each other.

Am I liking this? Does she like this?

I hope she likes me. I hope she will like me.

I want to convey my fluttering heart.

With that feeling in mind, I moved forward.

Even though we just kissed, my lower part began to swell slowly.

Kanna, sitting on top of me, noticed that and opened her eyes wide.

“Ah.”

The softly groaning Kanna reached for the box she had opened earlier.

She then took out a condom and gently offered it to me.

“…I’ll put it on for you. Ungh!?”

I couldn’t help but pull Kanna strongly into my arms with one hand.

And once again, I explored her lips deeply.

Ch. 168 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 168

“Huu, haa…”

Kanna let out a ragged breath.

The longer the kiss went on, the harder it became to breathe, and her chest repeatedly swelled and shrank heavily.

With her on top of me, our tongues tangled over and over, exchanging saliva, staring into each other’s eyes from an impossibly close distance—naturally, the mood grew heated.

My d*ck had gotten hard. It had been hard before, but now it felt like it might tear through my pants.

“Kanna…”

When I murmured her name, Kanna glanced at me with half-lidded eyes.

Then, as if resigning herself, she took a shaky breath and picked up the condom she had dropped earlier.

Still in its wrapper, she held it between her teeth and shifted slightly on top of me.

“?”

Before I could question it, Kanna reached for my waistband and tried to pull my pants down.

I knew what she was thinking.

Her hands were clumsy, so taking off clothes must be hard for her. That's why she wanted to do it for me. That had to be it.

But even knowing that, I didn't want to leave everything to her.

"No, I'll take them off."

"It's hard for you."

"I can manage that much."

"…Since I've already started, just let me, Hamin. You can take off my clothes instead."

Hearing that, I lifted my hips like I was entranced, making it easier for Kanna to slide my pants down.

Once they were off, my body slumped back.

Only my underwear remained, but Kanna nonchalantly pulled my d*ck out.

Positioning it right against her crotch, she tore open the condom wrapper and started mimicking what she'd seen earlier.

Since it'd be tricky for me to do with just one hand, she was being considerate. I didn't mind, so I stayed still.

Kanna stopped fumbling and used both hands to stretch the condom slightly before pressing it against the tip of my d*ck.

The unfamiliar sensation made me twitch, but only for a moment.

"Ngh…"

Kanna let out a soft m*an as she applied pressure.

The translucent sheath enveloped my length.

The rubbery material felt like it was squeezing me.

An unusual sensation—then Kanna's hand brushed over it.

It was so thin that I wondered if it'd dull the feeling, but aside from a slight strangeness, it was fine.

Still, doing it with something on versus nothing at all had to be different.

"Like this?"

"Yeah, that should do it."

I played along with Kanna's words.

Unlike before, I was leaving almost everything to her. It felt a little odd, but Kanna didn't seem to care, fully focused on one thing.

Kanna frowned slightly as she looked at my d*ck.

"…What's wrong?"

"No, it's just… I've seen it vaguely before, but I didn't realize it was this shape…"

"Does it look weird?"

"I don't know. Just grotesque."

"Hah, grotesque?"

"Too… throbbing, I guess."

Hearing that made me feel oddly embarrassed.

Maybe because I was the only one exposed, I reached out to move things along.

“Wha—?”

I grabbed Kanna’s clothes and pulled hard, tilting her body toward me from where she sat nearby.

“Oh? I like how soft your body is, Kanna.”

“……”

“Want to do it while hugging today?”

“Do what you want.”

I smirked at her response, but since she didn’t refuse, I went ahead and lifted her clothes.

The fabric slid up, revealing her belly and the bra beneath her chest.

I tried hard to undress her with one hand, but I quickly realized how difficult it was.

Having only one hand really was a problem.

But as if she knew, Kanna naturally lowered her waist, following my hand as she slowly undressed.

Her gaze, soft yet intense, seemed to ask, *Like this?*

It made my d*ck twitch.

“Your pants too.”

“I’ll take these off myself.”

When I whispered, Kanna chuckled and lowered her hands.

Her matching white underwear came into view.

Nothing overtly provocative, but the way her underwear clung and shifted carried its own allure.

Honestly, even without the underwear, the glimpses of her body were enticing.

The roundness of her br*asts, the curve of her waist, the swell of her hips.

The rustling fabric stirred me.

“Hamin, aren’t you taking yours off?”

“I will.”

Her whisper tickled my ear, and like I was spellbound, I pulled off my shirt.

Despite the late hour, the lights in the room stayed on.

Being in just our underwear on the bright bed was embarrassing.

But knowing I wasn’t the only one like that was reassuring.

“Haah…”

We’d done this before, so why was I trembling?

This was what I’d wanted so badly, so why did my chest keep tightening?

Thoughts like these came and went, but they didn’t last long.

Before I could dwell, Kanna pressed her body against mine, as if insisting the mood shouldn’t break.

“…It’ll hurt if we just go in, so… use your hand a little first.”

“Ah, yeah.”

Kanna leaned into my right hand, lowering her hips.

Naturally, my fingers slipped between her thighs, soon brushing against her panties.

The same scorching heat I’d felt before seeped into my fingertips.

No point hesitating now. I let my body guide my fingers.

Even through the fabric, I could feel the dampness as my finger slid into her folds.

“Ah—!”

Whether from surprise or something no amount of mental prep could prevent, Kanna’s body stiffened, then leaned into me.

Tap. She gripped my right shoulder, her hips trembling.

“Nn, ah—”

Is this how it’s supposed to be?

I wanted to find where she’d feel it most, so my fingers fidgeted more.

Without thinking, I slipped my hand under her panties, touching bare skin.

“Hyaah?!”

Kanna’s startled m*an sent a jolt through me.

The sound that reached my ears only made my d*ck harder.

Kanna’s hips twitched, and inside, sticky wetness began to seep out.

Her once-white panties were visibly damp.

“Enough?”

When I asked, Kanna gave a small nod.

She looked adorable. Before, I couldn’t see her expressions well in the dark, but now I could see every little thing—her face, her reactions—and it was so much better.

Before I could do anything else, Kanna moved.

“…I don’t get why you keep asking me to do this… but just for today…”

Saying that, she rose on the bed.

She seemed about to take off her panties but only slid one leg out before straddling me.

Maybe she found it too bothersome to take them off completely?

Thoughts swirled, but Kanna’s words stuck in my mind, drawing my gaze to her face.

She glared at me with sharp eyes.

“Got it?”

“…Sorry.”

“But today, I’ll let you go this far.”

Kanna stacked a box of condoms beside me.

Opened and unopened packs, plus the one already on me—six in total.

With that, she spread herself and aligned my d*ck with her entrance.

Lowering her hips, she took me in deeper than before.

Squelch. The tight sensation.

And then, the feeling of something at the end.

Not all of me was inside, but Kanna’s insides already felt full.

Compared to before, it wasn’t overwhelmingly intense, but it was still incredibly lewd and stimulating.

But more than that, what hit me now was guilt.

“You were scared.”

Kanna spoke as if to erase that unease.

Her voice, so close, made me lift my head without thinking.

Our eyes met instantly.

In this moment, I was one with Kanna—and as that merged self, I looked into her eyes.

“You thought we might never get to do this again… that you or I, or both of us, might d*e. That’s why you wanted to do it even once more, right?”

Kanna’s words stabbed at my chest.

Emotions I’d never voiced, just kept hiding—she spoke like she already knew them all.

“Because it felt hopeless? Because even with a prosthetic, you wondered if it’d really make a difference?”

Kanna’s arms pressed lightly against my stomach.

The pressure, meant to steady herself, made me swallow my breath.

I swallowed the silence.

“…Yeah.”

“I trust you’ll do well, Hamin.”

Kanna whispered that.

Pushing her hips slightly, she pressed against me again.

Her lips brushed my ear as she murmured.

“Hook… can you undo it?”

“Nn…”

My hand moved to her back, where the bra’s clasp rested between soft warmth.

Fumbling, I recalled its structure and worked the fastener.

Snap. The loosened straps signaled the bra was now just fabric.

The slightest shift would bare her chest, and that thought alone made me tense.

Whether she knew or not, Kanna kept her chest pressed close as she moved.

The motion—up and down—brought her br*asts against mine, accompanied by lewd, sticky sounds.

“Hamin… I like you too. But we can’t rely too much on pleasure. We can’t run away either. If you want to run, let’s run together. You don’t have to try so hard. You’ve already done enough.”

Kanna spoke her heart as she moved her hips.

Squelch, squelch. The sound of sticky fluids churning mixed with her voice, leaving me dazed.

This isn’t fair.

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My chest pressed against hers.

Although it seemed like Kanna's body was leaning halfway over my reclining figure, small movements of my c*ck and her p*ssy caused them to fidget, repeatedly stimulating each other.

When my c*ck twitched, it felt like Kanna's insides were trembling again.

Our chests were pressed against each other with only a bra between us, and I could feel her pulse directly.

"…Uncomfortable."

Kanna muttered softly, placing her hand on her chest.

Her body seemed to pull away for a moment, but soon her bra fell limply to the side, and her body pressed tightly against mine once more.

Warmth spread between us.

It wasn't the warmth from holding hands or the heat radiating from her p*ssy, but the feeling of embracing each other fully n*ked.

Her soft flesh pressed against my chest, and the only thought that lingered was that it was a pleasant pressure.

I thought today would be the only time, but realizing it wasn't made me happy.

We still faced adversity.

We knew there were significant obstacles ahead, both in our future and within this barrier.

Kanna's words about not fleeing from fear, not escaping from the reality that we might d*e, and not channelling it into s*xual acts were profoundly right.

I couldn't think of anything to argue, nor did I want to.

If there was one thing I wanted to say, it was this:

"Yeah, I won't run away anymore."

"…Idiot, it's okay to run away."

"You said it before, Kanna. Running away doesn't solve anything."

Kanna smiled at my words.

Held in her arms, she looked up at me from close range, and I wanted to kiss her again.

"…Wanna kiss?"

"Yeah."

Kanna readily accepted.

Had I hesitated before because I kept running away? Had I tried to quietly accept everything to erase that unease?

If so, Kanna was sorely mistaken.

Our tongues intertwined. Kanna's eyes gently closed, and mine did too.

Even so, Kanna’s hips didn’t stop moving, stimulating the tip of my c*ck ever so slightly.

The subtle sensation left me craving more. I wished for a stronger stimulus, and Kanna’s refusal to give it made her seem almost annoying.

Shake it a little harder.

But in that moment, with our lips sealed, I couldn’t say anything.

We were too busy intertwining our tongues and sharing warmth and pulses.

I pulled Kanna, who was moaning softly, closer and entwined our tongues more deeply.

This time, I wanted to indulge in everything, as if she had promised to accept all my whims.

So, I tangled our tongues until I was out of breath.

“Haa, haa…”

Kanna’s shoulders heaved.

She exhaled heavily and let go of our tongues.

A deep sense of regret lingered.

“I love you… I’ll protect you, no matter what. I won’t run away…”

“…….”

Kanna said nothing.

She was gasping for breath, trying to replenish the lack of oxygen.

I gently pulled her towards me and spoke.

“And there’s something I want to say.”

“Yeah?”

Kanna, tightly hugged, let out a small sound from within my arms.

“Part of it is because of the anxiety, but that’s not the only reason.”

The anxiety was definitely there.

But wanting to hold Kanna wasn’t about choosing s*xual pleasure to escape that anxiety.

Sure, there was that thought—to do it before d*ath, before the world ended—but that wasn’t the main goal.

It was just an explosion of everything I had suppressed while watching Kanna.

Seeing her n*ked, realizing the distance I kept while thinking of her just as a friend, and venting the frustration of needing to keep her at arm’s length.

In short, it was just because I liked Kanna.

“Wanting to do this with Kanna… isn’t because of anxiety. It’s just because I like you.”

“Ngh.”

Kanna, nestled in my arms, shivered slightly.

I saw her clenched fists, and smiling, I gently pulled her closer.

I really needed an extra arm to hold Kanna comfortably.

Carefully, I sat up.

My body, half-leaning against the wall, straightened into a sitting position, facing Kanna.

Of course, the difference was that Kanna was mounted on top of me, her p*ssy wrapped around my c*ck.

Naturally, Kanna’s body moved upwards.

Looking slightly up, I could meet her eyes; slightly down, I could see her chest.

We fit so well, even our heights matched, and I felt a sudden surge of happiness.

After hearing my words, Kanna’s gaze shifted nervously.

She was blushing fiercely, possibly embarrassed, and the corners of her lips twitched, maybe from a creeping sensation.

“…T-Turn off the light. There’s a remote over there.”

Her stuttering words were clearly her attempt to hide her current state.

“Sorry, it’s on the left, I can’t reach it.”

“…I’ll, I’ll reach it. Ugh.”

I grabbed Kanna and shook her hips once.

Her body clattered back and forth, letting out a lewd sound.

The sensation of being rubbed inside made Kanna’s body collapse like a ragdoll.

She reached for the remote on the drawer, but the continued stimulation made her body curl up.

I wrapped my arms around her and moved my body.

Holding Kanna and moving was indeed a bit tiring.

“Kanna, can I do it?”

“N-No, the remote… the light, hngh…”

Kanna reached out again, unsure of herself.

“Why? I’m finding you cute right now.”

“I don’t know, I don’t want to see your face…”

“I want to see yours, though.”

“The light…”

Kanna seemed especially embarrassed today.

I really wanted to see every inch of her in the bright light today, but knowing that on other days I wouldn’t get the chance, I didn’t want to spend this time in the dark.

“Isn’t today the last day? I want to do it in the light today.”

As I pleaded, Kanna moaned softly and then fell silent.

“Then… at least let me turn around…”

“Embarrassed?”

“…….”

Kanna said nothing and just buried her head.

Silence means approval, as they say, and that fit this situation perfectly.

I liked the brightness, but Kanna was searching for a place to hide her face.

Thinking of how Kanna struggled to move on her own, I suggested a position that suddenly came to mind.

“Then, want to get on all fours? With one arm, it’s a bit hard for me.”

“…….”

Without a word, Kanna followed my instructions and moved carefully.

Her p*ssy stretched with strands of fluid as I pulled my c*ck out.

Not soaked, but the fluid that trickled down the condom was as thick as honey.

Kanna bit her lower lip, burying her reddened face into the pillow.

It seemed she completely dismissed the idea of turning off the light with the remote.

Kanna didn’t lie flat but lifted her hips towards me, waiting.

I swallowed hard and spoke.

“Kanna, I’m not great at holding you, so hold on tight.”

“Ngh… okay.”

Kanna did as told, hugging the pillow that hid her face tightly.

It didn’t seem like she was going to be steady, but if it made her feel better, it was fine by me.

I caressed her buttocks with my hand.

The texture was soft, and Kanna’s body twitched in response.

I slid my c*ck back into her wetness.

It pushed smoothly into her p*ssy, which clung to it.

My c*ck, now deep inside her, trembled as if it had found its place.

“Ngh… ugh…”

Kanna’s waist stiffened.

Resting my hand on her lower back, I thrust forward.

Her body shook vigorously.

She rocked forward, then back, and with each thrust, her p*ssy swallowed my c*ck again.

The creaking of the bed was louder than I expected.

“Haa, haa, there…! Ngh?!”

I felt satisfied, as if I had found Kanna’s weakness.

Kanna received stronger stimulation when entered from behind.

“Ah, hngh!”

Holding Kanna’s slender waist with one hand, I rocked my hips.

As my actions became rougher, her moans grew louder.

“Ngh! Ugh!”

Eventually, Kanna buried her face in the pillow, unable to contain herself.

Her sharp moans were muffled, but somehow, it felt like sealing her mouth while having s*x unexpectedly satisfied my sadistic urges.

“Kanna, I’m close…”

No answer came.

Today wasn’t the day for coming inside, but wearing a condom gave me peace of mind to thrust harder.

As the pressure built, I tried to suppress it as much as possible, chasing the peak of pleasure while shaking my hips.

I held Kanna from behind, thrusting like a beast drenched in sweat.

Thud, thud, thud, thud—the tempo rose, and so did Kanna’s moans, now resembling sobs.

“Huuuu, huuuu!”

I came without hesitation, as if expelling all my semen inside her.

I felt the pleasure of shooting inside her but couldn’t fill her completely.

“Huu…”

As I pulled my c*ck out, Kanna’s p*ssy clenched tightly, causing the condom to slip off.

Semen dripped from the tip of the condom gripped by her p*ssy.

“Kanna, wait a moment…”

Is this something that happens often?

Trying to hide my confusion, I brought my hand to Kanna’s still-breathing p*ssy.

I tugged on the condom, which was tightly held, and saw the collected semen inside it.

“What do I do with this?”

I certainly never learned how to handle this.

Just when I considered turning the device on again, Kanna staggered to her feet.

Her eyes half-closed, she approached me, even though she had just climaxed intensely.

“H-Here, give it to me…”

“Uh, sure.”

I handed Kanna the semen-filled condom, and she silently stared at it before tying the end.

She threw it into the corner of the bed like a water balloon.

“Haa… exhausting…”

“Kanna, we’ve got five more left.”

“…….”

Kanna looked at me as if to ask why I said such a thing, then wiped the semen off my c*ck.

Then, she took another condom from the box beside us and tore off the wrapper.

“Here, take this…”

Kanna slid the condom onto my c*ck again, and I felt grateful as I entered her once more.

We stopped after five rounds, as even the electric current in Kanna’s body wouldn’t flow anymore due to exhaustion, but I was satisfied.

There was still one condom left, but since Kanna didn’t force me to get hard again, it felt like I could finally rest and quench my thirst.

Following what I learned from Kanna, I tied the last condom, tossed it aside, and collapsed next to her, falling asleep.

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Did I lose consciousness?

It felt like the interrupted film was starting again.

There were no memories during the gap, and my body was heavy, signaling that I had just woken up.

“…Ugh.”

As I tried to move my body, it didn’t cooperate.

Hamin was holding me like a deadweight, adding to the heaviness.

As I slowly raised my body and brushed Hamin’s right arm away, I felt something squishy at my feet.

There was even a slippery texture on the surface, causing a momentary chill.

Was there something squishy and slippery on the bed…?

Startled, I sat up and followed the object that had touched my foot with my eyes.

It was something filled with a transparent rubber, like a water balloon. Yet, it was ambiguous in quantity and didn’t expand as much as a balloon, making me recoil in shock.

“Ah… I must be really crazy.”

I muttered quietly so as not to wake Hamin next to me, covering my eyes with both hands.

Then, I pressed against my closed eyelids.

As I sighed, pressing on my throbbing head, memories from yesterday started to surface hazily.

I had told him that it was because of my anxiety, and that I would endure it if he promised to do it just today.

But Yoon Hamin replied that he wasn’t holding me out of anxiety.

I was so embarrassed that I couldn’t bring myself to look at Hamin’s face.

And this was still the case now.

I gazed at Hamin’s face, which seemed to wander in dreamland.

Soon, I turned my head abruptly as I felt heat rising to my face.

What I desired was to erase my anxiety. However, if I got addicted to escapism, that would also present a problem, so I wanted to pull back and put some distance between us.

But it wasn’t due to anxiety, rather, it was because he just wanted to hold me.

Was it simply due to s*xual desire? If that were the case, even if the anxiety disappeared, he might still want to hold me…

I had already predicted that Hamin wouldn’t end it with just one round.

However, the reason was different, and it was so unexpected that it made my heart race.

I groaned while holding my throbbing head.

But nothing was resolved, so with a resigned heart, I got up.

“Ah-choo!”

I sneezed as I slipped out from the wrapped blanket, having thrown all my underwear off while sleeping.

First, I should clean up the condoms on the bed.

With that thought, I reached out.

Wow, we used a lot. Given I had permitted six times, we surely must have gone crazy.

For some reason, Hamin was overflowing with stamina, and he said he wouldn’t d*e if he did it with me.

I grabbed one in my left hand.

Every time I picked one up, the left hand gained a subtle weight.

“…Wow.”

A voice escaped me, somewhere between disgust and admiration.

Is the quantity of semen high when someone has good stamina? I couldn’t take my eyes off it.

One, two, three, four, five…

“Huh?”

A sound escaped from my mouth.

All five were nearby, but I couldn’t see the last one.

I had two three-pack ones, but strangely enough, there were only five used condoms in my left hand, even though there should have been six.

I wondered if it was near Hamin, but I didn’t have the courage to look there, so my eyes wandered elsewhere.

There wasn’t just one way to find out.

I thought of checking the unused condoms to remember where the box for the last one was.

As I reached out, I let out a soft m*an.

A light sound rang out as an unused condom revealed itself from within the box.

“…Ah.”

We didn’t do it once.

I had promised to let him use them all; why had he saved one?

Was he tired? Or did he want to do it again later?

These questions swirled in my head, but I couldn’t find any answers right now.

Thinking of just getting rid of them, I moved my body, but Hamin opened his eyes and looked at me.

“Kanna, are you awake?”

“Ah, this is… I was just, um… going to throw them away…”

I waved my hands in a defensive manner as I explained.

Maybe it was a mistake to wave my hands, as I ended up shaking both the unused and used condoms in front of Hamin from the very early morning.

Who shakes used and unused condoms in their hands this early in the morning?

It felt like a crazy thing to do.

Realizing that, I quickly dropped my hands, but Hamin didn’t pretend he didn’t see it.

“Kanna, come here. It’s cold.”

“…No, I want to wash up.”

“You’re tired.”

“…….”

That was indeed true.

The morning sun had risen, and the sunlight was nudging at my eyelids, so I was awake, but it didn’t feel like all my fatigue had washed away.

Mumbling, I eventually put down what I was holding to tiptoe towards where Yoon Hamin was.

I climbed back onto the bed and slipped under the blanket.

As if waiting, Hamin lifted his arms and pulled me into an embrace.

Even though we were both n*ked, Hamin seemed to enjoy it.

Though I couldn’t say anything, I just felt that warmth.

“Hamin.”

“Yeah?”

“…Is what you said yesterday really true?”

I heard my heart pounding.

I couldn’t tell if it was Hamin’s or mine.

I wasn’t looking at Hamin’s face.

It felt too embarrassing to recall yesterday’s events, and I didn’t want to put it into words, but I squeezed out the question.

Because of that, I couldn’t face him.

“What do you mean?”

When Hamin asked back, it felt like air was being cut off from my throat.

Wasn’t that the only thing I had expressed yesterday? How could he forget that?

No, could it be that I said something strange while I was unconscious?

There might be so many things to consider, making it hard for him to respond.

I repeatedly thought seriously.

But there were no conclusions being formed.

“That, um, yesterday… not because of anxiety… but simply because I like you, I want to do this…”

I dropped my head low.

I squeezed my eyes shut.

Holding onto my heart, which felt like it might burst, I curled up.

Even with my racing heart drowning out everything else, Hamin’s voice broke through.

“Yeah, it’s true. I love you.”

“…….”

It felt like my cheeks were genuinely thick.

I found it unfathomable how he could say something so embarrassing with such ease.

Maybe you have to be that bold to be the protagonist.

“I don’t know; I’m tired. I’m going to sleep…”

I said that and bit my lips.

However, it wasn’t a bad feeling, and my pulse calmed down.

I felt like I could sleep soundly.

“Um, Kanna…?”

“Yeah?”

I answered quietly, keeping my eyes gently closed.

Then Hamin shivered and started to touch my body with his hands.

“Yesterday, there was one left…”

“…….”

Just before I fell asleep, something hot touched between my legs.

I couldn’t say a word and grabbed my throbbing head.

“Do you know what time it is?”

“…Usually, men are like this in the morning.”

“…Are you serious?”

I was at a loss for words.

But I couldn’t push him away forcefully.

It wasn’t because of anxiety, but rather because I was aware that I liked him.

Are we just pressed against each other n*ked right now, so that’s why?

If that were the case, then there was no avoiding it… Since we started in the early morning, less than a day had passed, and since we only said today, it shouldn’t be a problem, right?

“…Well, since it hasn’t been a day yet…”

While seriously contemplating, I let Hamin move my body however he wanted from early in the morning.

Taking the initiative, I put on the condom for him, who couldn’t do it alone, and continued what we had started last night.

*

“Oh, I feel like I’m going to d*e…”

I sat on the sofa with tired eyes wide open.

Having finally escaped from Hamin to wash up and sit on the sofa, it was already 2 PM.

We had only done it once, but what mattered was that we did it as soon as I woke up in the morning.

My throbbing head felt heavy, making me slump over onto the sofa.

Flopping down, I gazed at the screen that streamed on pointlessly.

[It will rain this evening. Clouds are coming down from the surrounding areas due to the change in atmospheric pressure, so please remember to take

an umbrella if you go out.]

So it’s going to rain.

Using an umbrella is a hassle, but I didn’t mind the rain.

Even if it didn’t work out, just standing in front of the door with the door open looking up at the rain, the smell of soil seeping out from the front yard was so pleasant.

I took a deep breath.

After laying my exhausted body down, I let all the tension seep out.

I had just gotten up to wash, and I worried that I would end up falling asleep again.

I shouldn’t sleep, or else my body clock would get messed up.

With a groan, I forced myself to sit up, keeping my tired eyes open as I turned my head.

I saw Hamin walking out in a somewhat unsteady manner, perhaps to wash up.

Hamin, wearing only his underwear, carefully approached me.

“Um, Kanna, I’m going to wash up and then go to the hospital.”

“…Why the hospital? Don’t tell me, did I… inside you while I was sleeping yesterday…!?”

“Ah, no!”

Hamin screamed as if to assert his innocence.

Ch. 171 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 171

Urology.

I believe that being healthy enough to avoid going to any hospital is the best, but at least this place is one of those places that should be avoided.

While I hope that there won't be any issues in this regard as I live my life… it seems that the world doesn't always go the way people want it to.

After going to the hospital and undergoing tests, I received a mixed look of admiration and incredulity from the doctor.

"Could it be that you rubbed against a hot pack or something? Or hot water? The only time burns happen here is in those situations."

"No, that's not it… it happened with my girlfriend, and then this happened…"

Under normal circumstances, there should only be a tingling electric current flowing, stopping at strong stimulation.

And that stimulation turns into pleasure; even if the erection doesn't go away, the satisfaction and ecstasy can be described as unspeakable.

Thinking it would be the same this morning, I held Kanna, and the result was this.

I did it twice. There had never been an incident like this before, yet the moment I did it in the morning, it felt like I had hit the jackpot, and the heat

rose dramatically to the point of burning—it seemed absurd.

Who could have predicted that?

Expressing my grievance, the doctor took a serious look and fixed his gaze on his computer.

“So, is your girlfriend an Awakened One?”

“…Yes.”

“That could be the case. They do come by sometimes. Awakened Ones with heat attributes.”

“Really?”

“Whether male or female, there are times when they can’t control themselves at the moment of climax. Of course, those who know how to handle their abilities well are exceptions.”

Listening to the doctor’s words, I nodded instinctively.

Then, the doctor smiled bitterly.

“For now, I’ll take basic measures, so it would be best for you to abstain from acts for a while and focus on recovery.”

“…Understood. Thank you.”

Kanna said it would be just today, and since it had barely been a day since this morning, I wondered if I could ask for just one more before the day ended, but I never imagined it would turn out like this.

It was fine at night, but why was the morning different?

The tingling felt more intense, and the heat was stronger than before.

Could it be due to friction heat? Since we did it like that yesterday, maybe it got heated up.

I knew I was being silly.

It was simply that the harsh reality I couldn’t accept was hitting me in the face, and I wanted to deny it.

With sluggish steps, I came out of the hospital.

Kanna said to bring an umbrella if she would be late, but the sky looked dense, hinting that rain was coming.

I didn’t plan to stay outside for long, so I didn’t bring an umbrella, but I quickened my pace, feeling I would get completely soaked if I didn’t head back.

“…Ah.”

My emotions were fluctuating.

Sometimes I felt good, and other times I felt gloomy.

Just like the current weather.

But it was an emotion that came from something else, not some monster breaking through from beyond a barrier.

I wished it would always be like this.

If we could protect humanity and defeat the monsters, we could continue this lifestyle.

For that to happen, this scenery had to be maintained.

Going hand in hand with Kanna, it would surely be preferable to visit a bustling amusement park rather than a desolate place devoid of people.

I looked up at the sky.

The gloomy clouds seemed to soak my emotions.

It wasn’t even raining yet.

Buzzz, I felt a vibration from my pocket.

“Hello?”

[Ah, Yoon Hamin. Is it a good time?]

“Yeah, I just stepped out and am on my way home. Why? Is something up?”

Tilting my head, Orca nonchalantly conveyed her business.

[The prosthetic arm seems like it will be completed next week. Is Saturday next week good for you?]

“Already? That’s quick. I thought it would take longer since you’re busy.”

[This isn’t much. Getting the metal took longer.]

If I had encountered her right in front of me, I might have seen her shoulders shrugging.

“By the way, the options we decided on remain the same, right? Is there anything you want to remove?”

[Nothing to remove. It can withstand water and your abilities, but removing either would cause a lot of issues. I made sure it can handle your output as we discussed before.]

“That’s a relief.”

I felt a bit anxious about whether it could really handle maximum output, but if they had resolved it to some extent, it should be okay, right?

[But if you use it too much, I think the prosthetic might melt. I've added a gauge bar to show the permissible level of magical power so you can check as you use it.]

"Thanks, I owe you one."

[…It's what I have to do. Since your role is important, I want to support you even more. Please reduce it by half from the amount we discussed earlier. I'll cover half of it.]

Startled, I unconsciously pulled my hand away and stared at the device's screen.

Looking at the screen wouldn't show me Orca's face, but my gaze fixated on the call interface.

"No, there's no need for that. I'll just split the principal and send it."

[You're going to pay it in installments anyway. If the world falls apart, that money won't mean anything. Just accept it as a token of goodwill.]

"Huh."

I was at a loss for words.

I felt fortunate that there was someone like her, who sincerely looked at me and believed in what I said.

With the same thoughts in mind and acting on them, where else could I find such a reliable partner?

"Thank you."

Feeling perplexed and unsure of what to say, I knew what I had to say.

I looked at the darkening sky. It was still day, but shadows began to blanket the world like evening was approaching.

A cool breeze swept through the city that had been heated up by the sunlight.

I turned my head to look at the barrier.

Thinking about when and where the barrier would break was disheartening.

On the big TV set atop a skyscraper in the city, a news story about monsters was being aired.

Amidst everyone’s anxiety, there I was, once again wishing for the mundane days filled with little joys, sorrows, worries, and overcoming challenges.

It seemed like those in this place felt the same way.

[You’re welcome. I’ll hang up now.]

“Alright. I’ll come next week.”

[Okay, take care.]

Click. The call disconnected.

My gaze remained fixed in one spot.

I felt uneasy. Truthfully, I didn’t want to fight.

But I understood that there was no choice but to fight.

Fighting for my life was about protecting my life.

The reason I fought without retreating was to ensure Kanna wouldn’t have to fight.

To eradicate fighting, countless battles had to be fought.

I had to remind myself of that over and over again.

By the time evening came, it started pouring rain.

The time was still 7 PM. It was still early for summer to be dark, but as the clouds gathered, it became dark like night.

The sound of pouring rain greeted me from beyond the large living room window.

Kanna was staring blankly at the window.

I stood subtly next to her.

“…Why did you go to the hospital today?”

Kanna carefully asked what she was curious about.

She was the one who had panicked, thinking I was passing out and needed medication.

I thought I should be honest with her, so I sighed and approached her.

Standing side by side, we looked outside at the darkening scene.

The raindrops fell in torrents, hitting the window and flowing down in rivulets.

“This morning, while we were… you know, Kanna’s ability came out stronger than yesterday, so I had to go to urology…”

“…….”

Kanna didn’t respond to what I said.

Did I say something unnecessary? I felt my face heat up in embarrassment.

But if I was going to say it, I preferred being honest to avoid misunderstandings.

This was the wise way to go. I just had to endure a moment of embarrassment.

A moment of silence passed. Unable to bear it, I spoke first.

“Speaking of which, Orca contacted me.”

“What did she say?”

“She said the prosthetic arm will be ready next week.”

“Really? That’s a relief. It must have been hard living with just one arm.”

“Right.”

I smiled bitterly, wrapping my right arm around my left arm.

The ambiguous left arm was reduced to just a shoulder. I felt a sense of emptiness, but I also felt relief knowing that something would soon fill that void.

“She said we should go next Saturday. You’re coming along too, right?”

“Yeah, well. It would be boring to stay home alone.”

Kanna tended to stay at home during the day. As such, it seemed she was pleased to be at Orca’s mansion where she could be out and about during the day.

It must be frustrating. But since she knew there was no helping it, she didn’t complain.

If she wanted to feel the wind, she could at least go to the front yard or walk around at night when it was less crowded.

“What does Kanna want to do?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, if people didn’t say anything to Kanna, is there something she would want to do?”

Kanna looked at me upon hearing my words.

Her gaze, which had been fixed on me, turned back to the rain.

As she quietly listened to the sound of raindrops, Kanna slightly lifted her head.

Staring at the clouds that were scattering the rain, she whispered.

“I want to go out because it’s frustrating.”

I couldn’t tell if she was talking about this house or the barrier.

Ch. 172 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 172

I wanted to go out because I felt frustrated. I wanted to escape from this moment, living a life as if I were trapped in a cage.

This house, and this world that seems to bind me.

The feeling of wanting to return home, even though I was at home, grew stronger. Even though I was here right now, my heart felt uneasy, so I unconsciously sought a space where I could feel at ease, and that feeling and sensation were all I could obtain.

I always had to spend time in hiding like this, and leaving could only happen during the night when people’s eyes wouldn’t see me, making the feeling even more intense.

Without realizing it, my emotions deepened, making my jaw clench slightly.

But now, a week later, a moment had come that somewhat offset that feeling.

“Is this how you attach it?”

“Yes, you attach it like this, and finally press here… Ta-da, it’s fixed and connected to the nerves at the same time. Even though it’s metal, it shouldn’t feel completely disconnected.”

“That’s impressive technology. How does it feel?”

“It’s a trade secret. I don’t know either.”

Hamin and Orca were chatting while attaching Hamin’s left arm, which had been inconveniently absent until now. With his shirt removed, the left arm clicked into place and soon started to move in sync with Yoon Hamin’s will, creaking slightly.

“Oh, it moves well.”

Hamin placed his right hand on his left shoulder and swung his left arm around.

“Feels good?”

“I’m relieved. I don’t think I’ll feel empty even when I wear clothes now.”

“Yeah, that makes sense. Should I try putting on some clothes first?”

Hamin slid on a short-sleeved shirt.

Now that it’s July, he had no choice but to wear short sleeves due to the heat. And it ended up exposing Yoon Hamin’s metal arm.

Since the arm goes from shoulder to fingertip, how much could a short sleeve really cover? It was bound to draw a lot of attention.

Still, I felt relieved that it wouldn’t be me who stood out.

Since Yoon Hamin has gained some recognition now, he wouldn’t be easily contacted, nor would people seek out his location if he turned the device on.

This might be because Lucia was providing support out of sight?

“How does Kanna look? How’s the design?”

“The short sleeves stand out a lot.”

Orca shrugged, as if to say that was the limit.

“Still, it’s made for fighting, so durability is guaranteed. It just needs to be usable like a normal arm. Moreover, if it melts while enduring Yoon

Hamin’s ability, that would be a problem, so I hesitated to use artificial skin.”

Artificial skin melting. Would the melted artificial skin cling to the prosthetic? If that were the case, there would be problems if it stuck around the joints or similar areas.

I wondered if there was always a reason behind how experts designed things. It felt like they had prepared answers for when ordinary people said, “Isn’t this a little weird?”

“How is it?”

Thanks to the new arm, Hamin seemed more comfortable, repeatedly clenching and unclenching his fist and moving his arm around to regain sensation.

“It’s fine.”

I nodded at him.

“Since it’s come to this, should we do a prosthetic test? If we sh**t toward the sky at the open area, nothing will explode even if we overdo it.”

“I wonder if that’s okay.”

“After all, Yoon Hamin, you can skillfully break off or stop in the middle of things.”

Hamin mumbled, “That’s true,” then seemed resigned and got up.

“Shall we go?”

“Kanna will come along too. I’ll make sure you have a weapon so you don’t feel empty on the way back.”

“Ah, yes.”

A weapon. Was there any weapon I could wield?

The buzzing cicadas announced the arrival of summer. The blazing sun was hitting my skin, and the heat clung to my body as if trying to draw out my sweat.

Thanks to the high-quality sunscreen Orca lent me, I could somehow prevent my skin from burning, but I was reminded once again that it wasn't just about the skin.

That's why places with air conditioning or fans are the best.

That said, I didn't want to wait alone in the room while everyone was out, so I stood there despite the sweat pouring down.

"It's hot. Huh."

Orca said that and placed something strange on the box beside me. It seemed like a stand for a sword, and I was curious about what it was.

"…What is this?"

"Oh, this? It's a sword for Yoon Hamin; it's quite a good one."

"Really?"

Not having an eye for weapons, I just thought it looked clean and nice, expressing my admiration.

"It's a renowned sword left by my grandfather…"

"Wait, why is a renowned sword left by your grandfather…?"

I felt my brain freeze for a moment. Did I hear it wrong? But it didn't seem to be the case.

I was astonished, wondering why Orca would want to lend Hamin a renowned sword left by her grandfather, but Orca had a serious expression as if she had already made up her mind to hand it over.

“It’s meant to be used to save the world. My family, starting with my father, has always wished for stability behind the barrier. For the greater good, for everyone’s peace. But if no matter how strong we make the barrier, we can’t stop what threatens it, we have to bring down those who break it.”

Orca reached out.

Clink, she grasped the sword encased in its scabbard.

“But our family exists to protect; we haven’t forged anything like a spear to take down the monsters standing behind the barrier. Our abilities couldn’t even become a sharp spear.”

Orca voiced her condition. That wasn’t a complaint; it was simply the look of someone who accurately understood her situation and was trying to find what she could do.

“So, I’m entrusting it to you. To be honest, I wonder if I’d have thought about this if it weren’t for Kanna. I probably wouldn’t have gone this far. We would have just remained in our position, doing our duties quietly.”

Orca’s eyes were on Yoon Hamin.

The ability visible as light, and the continuous solid lines were swirling around him. It was growing brighter and pulsating, exuding a power that captivated the gaze.

“As a student of the Academy, and as the noble lady of the Lamiris family. At the end of keeping that position, was I happy?”

Orca quietly asked and then chuckled softly.

“I wasn’t trying to corner you. I don’t know what kind of world Kanna sees, so it would be rude to pretend to know. If I had seen that world, would I have acted like Kanna?”

The blue eyes that looked at me were filled with sadness. Yet within that sadness lay determination.

It was Orca’s best effort to deduce my thoughts by observing my reaction and recalling what she had experienced.

She gazed at me intently before moving forward. Her footsteps resolved into steady strides toward Yoon Hamin.

“Yoon Hamin, would you like to swing the sword once?”

“A sword?”

“Yes, if we’re going to fight, I think we should have a good weapon.”

“Then that’s great.”

Hamin answered readily and accepted the sword.

I wanted to say that it belonged to Orca’s grandfather. Orca seemed to know that saying this would cause Hamin to refuse, so she kept silent. Since she only mentioned it was a good sword, I had no room to intervene.

As she drew the sword from its scabbard, the pitch-black blade revealed itself.

“Why is it pitch black?”

“It’s made from the same metal as the prosthetic arm. This sword will resonate with you, Yoon Hamin, and it will amplify your power as well.”

Orca entrusted her will.

“How’s the output of the prosthetic?”

“I don’t think it can withstand the maximum output.”

“Then let’s utilize this sword instead. Getting accustomed to its use will be the only way for you to stay on the battlefield even one second longer.”

“…Thank you, I’ll take it well.”

Orca said that and then turned back to me.

“Do you need a weapon, Kanna?”

“…Um, I’ve never swung a weapon before, so I’m not sure.”

Hamin elegantly wielded the newly received pitch-black sword. With his right hand on the sword and his left hand controlling the output, he looked impressive as he diligently trained.

Orca, seeming to have something good for me, pulled out a sword from the box she had brought.

“I think a sword would suit Kanna better. It’s lighter than what Yoon Hamin is holding.”

“Then I’ll gladly accept it.”

“…I want to fight too.”

After handing me the sword, she grumbled as if to voice a complaint.

“Oh, it’s not that I like fighting! I just want to fight back-to-back together rather than staying safely tied to the family like this.”

As I watched Orca making excuses, I couldn’t help but twitch my mouth. And in the end, I couldn’t hold back and blurted out.

“…Do you want to fight? Do you want to fight with Yoon Hamin?”

“Don’t get me wrong. I want to fight together with Yoon Hamin and Kanna. So don’t worry.”

“Really?”

“Really?”

Why should I be worried? Something feels strange. Where did the focus go wrong?

“What I want to say is whether you want to fight or not.”

“Of course. If I’m going to d*e anyway, I want to struggle with all my might.”

“Then why don’t you just do it?”

“I can’t. I’m the heir…”

Anyway, after getting back on topic somehow, I was just here to help Orca do what she wanted.

“There’s a younger brother who can be the heir.”

Upon hearing that, Orca’s eyes widened. Then she smiled as if feeling deflated.

“It seems like Kanna knows a lot.”

“No, I don’t know much. Just, a few things vaguely…”

“Isn’t it frightening to know so much?”

Orca’s gaze resembled sadness. But it didn’t seem to be sadness about her own situation.

I responded to her with a smile, despite her sad expression.

“…But I can’t give up because of that.”

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The metal of pitch black color was simply named Black Iron.

Black Iron had the trait of absorbing and releasing magical power well. When using abilities, having one of these auxiliary items would definitely prove useful.

It was difficult to obtain, and the technology required to handle it was extraordinary, so the price skyrocketed. However, for heroes and Awakened Ones with plenty of money, it was an item they would likely each have in their hands.

Commonly existing as weapons, and sometimes as easy-to-carry accessories, this metal amplified one’s abilities as an Awakened One.

Of course, just because it could be used that way didn’t mean it would always expend all of its power. Even when amplified, if it reached its limits, it could not handle the magical power and would shatter, so caution was necessary when using it.

There wasn’t much to worry about, but Yoon Hamin was the exception.

That was why even with such metal, caution was needed, and since if it melted away, one could no longer fight, there was a gauge bar indicating a warning.

In Hamin’s hand, which could only be described as impressive, a sword had now been gripped.

The jet-black blade seemed to boast a darkness that could swallow even sunlight.

Yoon Hamin swung the sword he received from Orca a couple of times with his right hand.

After gripping it with both hands and taking a stance, he swung it swiftly forward, making one wonder if such a heavy sword was truly manageable with just two hands.

I was barely able to grip an ordinary sword myself.

“The weight feels fine, and it seems easy to get used to,” he said.

After swinging it a couple more times, Hamin smiled as if satisfied.

Then Orca, who was next to him, nodded her head.

“That’s a relief.”

“Uh, yeah. But isn’t this expensive?”

“If you’re that concerned, just fight and win, and you can return it.”

Orca chuckled while Hamin forced a smile.

“Is that so? Got it. But what were you two talking about?”

Hamin seemed to show interest in me and Orca, as if signaling the end of training. I just wet my parched lips without saying a word.

I couldn’t bring up the hidden younger brother without Orca’s permission.

“Oh, we were picking out weapons that Kanna could use. And I was also looking to see if there was something I could use.”

“Really? What kind of weapon do you like, Orca?”

“If I’m going to use one, I’d prefer a lightweight sword. I can’t handle

anything as heavy as Yoon Hamin’s sword.”

“What did Kanna choose?”

Hamin’s interest turned to me. I felt awkward standing there, but suddenly being asked a question left me flustered, unsure how to respond.

“Uh, I was just going to use this.”

I held out the sword I received from Orca. Unlike the one Hamin was using, it was a single-edged sword focused on cutting.

Double-edged swords are good for cutting, but due to their hefty feel, they can also be used for striking even if the blade gets damaged; however, this was not a double-edged sword. Still, its relatively light weight made it possible for someone with less physical strength to wield it.

“That looks nice too.”

Hamin smiled at me.

“…Really?”

Hearing that, I stared at the sword for a while. Then I tightened my grip with both hands on the sword.

If I use it well, could I look a bit better? Just like Orca said, if we fought together, couldn’t I contribute to changing the future somehow?

Let’s think about it. It seemed hard to do it alone, so I wasn’t shy about asking for help.

I had faced rejection, but now I had two allies who would rush to my side without hesitation.

It didn’t make sense to hide safely in such a setting while having those allies. Even Orca, who had to stay hidden because of her family, was considering fighting.

But could I just sit still like this? No, if I stayed idle, I would ultimately be just a mere observer.

However, isn’t it different now? If I speak, they could hear me, and if I reach out, I could touch them. This wasn’t a different world or a different dimension; it was simply a matter of reality.

Now, this was my reality.

If I didn’t do my best in reality, where else could I possibly do my best?

“I’ll swing it once.”

So I decided to give it a try. I took a step forward.

“Speaking of which, I’ve never seen Kanna wield a weapon before.”

“…Neither have I.”

Leaving the two voices behind, I moved to the space where Hamin had been sweating until a moment ago.

The loud cicadas directed their cheering voices toward me. It felt as if the hot sunlight was shining on me like a spotlight.

Using the open area of the Lamiris family mansion as my stage, I swung the sword.

It didn’t cut through with strength and speed in a straight line. I couldn’t draw a smooth and beautiful sword line either.

The rough swing of the sword proved that I had never swung a sword before.

“Ugh.”

My body swayed. Although I swung it with all my might, it was clear to me that it wasn’t good. How could I expect to cover my eyes and pretend it was all fine when my body was crying out otherwise?

As I groaned, Hamin, who had been trying to rest in the shade, began to walk toward me again.

“Kanna, do you want me to show you?”

“…No, um, yeah…”

Though I wanted to say, “It’s okay, it must be hot,” that thought came up to my throat, but I eventually nodded, thinking that if I let this time slip away, it would only be running away from my chance to improve.

“I want to swing it even just once more and be of help.”

So I spoke honestly. I decided not to hide my feelings. I wanted to be straightforward.

As I hesitantly asked Hamin for help, Hamin smiled and reached out to my hand.

“Tonight…”

“d*e.”

“Sorry, just try holding my hand like this.”

Hamin closed his mouth and began to give the advice he originally intended to share.

“You’re right-handed, right? So you should hold the sword like this, let your left hand lightly support it. So you can let go at any time.”

“Why would I let go?”

“You can’t always swing from above to below. In urgent situations, your stance with the sword can change at any time, and to use that effectively, it’s better to keep your left hand free.”

“I see.”

I quietly looked at the sword gripped in my hand. My right hand clung tightly to the grip while my left hand held the end of the hilt, creating space in between.

I felt that, as Hamin said, it would indeed give me more freedom in swinging.

“Like this, you should swing it.”

Watching Hamin swing his sword alongside mine, I tried to follow suit repeatedly to get a feel for it.

“It feels like I’m swinging futilely. Is this right?”

“It can’t be helped; since you’re swinging in the air, it might take a little time to develop your sense.”

“…Hmm.”

“Since Kanna isn’t used to wielding weapons, it’ll take some time to get the hang of it. But if you practice in between, you should pick it up quickly even while swinging in the air.”

“Got it, I’ll do my best.”

Though I felt a bit unsure, since Hamin, who knew how to handle a sword, said it that way, I had no choice but to give it a try.

Woosh, woosh, the sword sliced through the air.

“Wow, do you hear the sound of the wind?”

“I think your stance is a bit off.”

“…The sound of the wind.”

“I think your grip is wrong too.”

“…….”

While practicing diligently, I suddenly heard the sound of wind, and for a moment, I wondered if I had some talent. However, my body became fatigued, causing my stance to fall apart, which was a problem.

After all, a person’s talent wouldn’t be discovered so easily. Life is about finding and nurturing one’s talents, so there was no need to be too anxious.

What if I didn’t have talent? It just meant I couldn’t become a genius. It meant I wouldn’t stand above others.

Even if I couldn’t be a genius, I could still be a competent person.

As I prepared with that mindset, I felt a surge of emotions.

Thoughts of the reality I had faced when I first came here flooded back. I had thought that if I just worked hard, everything would be fine, but then I found myself lamenting when things didn’t go well.

My teeth clenched. To suppress those feelings, I swung the sword. I put strength into my hands gripping the heavy metal and fiercely sliced through the air.

Even though it was said my stance was still off, and I was starting to tire, it was clear I wasn’t performing as well as before. The wind was informing me of that.

The sound was grating.

“Kanna, be careful. If you swing it emotionally, it will only get weirder.”

I swung the sword one last time, as if to vent my frustrations, and then I exhaled deeply, releasing all tension from my body.

The sword fell to the ground with a clatter, and my shoulders heaved up and down.

It felt like I had failed numerous times, over and over again, in my life, and I wondered if success could ever be attainable.

I still hadn’t managed to avoid being in last place.

I had set out to protect lives, but it wasn’t as if no one had died.

Had everything I tried to do turned to bubbles, becoming worthless?

Would it lead to another strange ending?

If that were all because I was the root cause, it felt like my heart would crumble.

“…Kanna? Are you okay? Does it hurt? If it’s tough, let’s take a break. It’s only the first day.”

Even though I was clumsy because it was the first time, I didn’t even know why I felt so disappointed. Just thinking that I hadn’t done anything right until now left an uneasy feeling that wouldn’t go away.

It should be a matter of renewing my resolve and moving forward in whatever I would do next, but why is it that feelings are not so easily swayed?

I ground my teeth.

“I want to do it just once more…”

Saying that, I gripped the sword that I had dropped again.

Ch. 174 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 174

Success and failure. Achieving a goal means success, and anything else is failure unless one compromises. In fact, objectively speaking, the moment you compromise can also be called a failure.

Anyway, my life has been a path of continuous failure.

I failed, and then I failed again, and I tried to get up, thinking there would be a next time. Just because I failed once didn’t mean it was the end, so I had no intention of stopping here.

For a moment, I had that determination, but the gazes and atmosphere around me created by my failures weighed me down.

I realized anew how sorrowful it was to have no allies. If there had been no mockery or ridicule aimed at me, I might have managed to endure somehow.

The events of the past are all behind me. I thought I had overcome everything.

Now, even being in last place, I promised myself that I wouldn’t be intimidated, because I had Hamin by my side, and Orca was there to help me.

But the current me was too much of a coward.

Why was I collapsing again? Why was I crying after falling again when I had been running well?

Now I knew that it was because I wouldn’t be able to get up again if I failed.

Even if I couldn’t do anything, I tried to find a shortcut somehow.

In this world with a history completely different from the one I knew, it was challenging to survive as an academy student, and eventually, I turned my eyes to shortcuts as a compromise.

I compromised, but I didn’t fail. Studying well wasn’t my goal. I struggled to find success.

I wanted to improve my grades to increase my influence, so my teacher would listen to me, but since that didn’t work out, I turned to Yoon Hamin.

I wanted to save people somehow, so I reached out. Monsters attacked in unimaginable ways and at a faster pace than before, but for the peace of this world and for the smile of Yoon Hamin that would come as a result, I tried to protect it.

But can this scene be called success? Can we honestly say we will succeed over the carnage made of red flowers?

Doubt arose. And that doubt gradually turned into fear.

Should I have spent three years with my eyes closed, wishing for every d*ath until now to be the d*ath of someone who was supposed to d*e? Was it enough to just hold on until the very end somehow?

There was no one to provide an answer. It was a question only for myself.

If I fail, I just have to get up again. Not achieving my goal didn’t mean I hadn’t succeeded; it wasn’t completely in vain. I tried to get up time and again, but now my legs trembled, and I couldn’t stand.

I was scared. Anxious, and struggling. Could I really do well? I had to do well, but how?

Countless worries and concerns raced through my mind.

No matter how many times I simulated it in my head, it was difficult to gauge what I could truly say was doing my best.

I don’t want to d*e.

Failure was not d*ath. Normally, it wouldn’t be.

But now it was different. Success was survival, while failure was the loss of life.

“Ugh…”

I wasn’t particularly talented. Still, I swung my sword diligently. Just once, I wanted to touch the enemy.

The blade sliced through the air in quick strokes, cutting through the void several times. Unlike before, the excessive sound of wind diminished.

“Kanna, are you practicing again today?”

“…Yeah. I often can’t use my ability.”

“Since it’s hot, let’s practice a little and then go in.”

From the moment I returned with the sword I received from Orca’s house, I practiced every day without missing a single day. No one mocked me for being clumsy with the sword, so I was able to grow stronger without collapsing.

Swinging the sword countless times under the blazing sun felt good as the heat enveloped me. Hamin seemed curious about me and waved a fan.

“Ugh, it’s hot. I’m sweating.”

“Hamin, you go inside. I’ll just practice a little more.”

“You’re not going to go in when you say that, are you?”

“…Then why are you sitting here?”

“Well, I firmly believe that if I get really hot, Kanna will come in with me.”

At a loss for words, I stared blankly at Yoon Hamin’s face.

“Then I’ll really practice just a little more.”

“No, it’s meaningful to go in together.”

“What meaning is there in going back home?”

“The meaning lies in doing anything together.”

Hamin answered playfully.

I sighed deeply at him and let my shoulders droop.

“Then let’s swing the sword ten more times and go in.”

“Yay! Kanna, you’re the best!”

“What are you talking about…”

I turned my head sharply.

I only went along with his insistence to join him in going inside, yet I wondered if it was something to be this happy about.

It’s nice to express affection because he likes me that much, but it was too straightforward, making me embarrassed. Wasn’t he one of the reasons why it was getting even hotter?

Once, twice, the blade was swung rapidly.

Only smashing down created such a long interval, and during the time spent returning to the original stance, I couldn’t attack, so I started practicing

upward swings and learned to swing in the opposite direction when the sword tilted to the right or left.

“Ha!”

My hair, tied up, swayed as I swung upward. When the sword finally reflected the sunlight and sparkled, Hamin, who had been watching quietly, clapped.

Although there was no sound of applause since one side was a prosthetic arm, the muffled sound was still quite nice.

“That was amazing! Kanna, you feel incredibly fast!”

“Really?”

I thought he was delighted about going in quickly, but that didn’t seem to be the case. He said the last stance was also good, which filled me with pride, thinking that my stamina had increased and my posture had improved.

“Okay, let’s go in now.”

Feeling satisfied, I went inside with Hamin.

And the breeze from the air conditioner, which had remained cold without an owner for so long, welcomed me. I tried to lower my heated body temperature, as if the air had been dipped in ice, and the sweat accumulated from my vigorous movements began to cool my body.

“The temperature is seriously low.”

“I set it to 18 degrees so it would cool down quickly when I came out.”

“I think 20 degrees would be fine.”

“Just raise it now.”

Hamin said that and picked up the remote from the table near the sofa, increasing the temperature a bit.

“I feel like I can survive now.”

I held my sweat-soaked shirt and fanned myself with it.

“Hey, Kanna.”

“Yeah?”

“Are you going to shower?”

“Why? If you want to shower first, go ahead. I’ll be in front of the air conditioner.”

“I thought it would be nice to shower together if you’re going to.”

Hamin naturally made the suggestion to me. However, it was too straightforward to miss.

“You sweated so much that if you dry off in front of the air, it’ll become a hassle to shower, right? And besides, it would be odd to lie on the sofa while still sweaty.”

But seeing him putting in the effort made me chuckle.

“Do you really want to shower together that much?”

“…No, it’s not that…”

Since I realized that he wasn’t saying that to escape from anxiety but rather because he genuinely liked me, whenever he brought up such topics, laughter came to me before worry.

It was also funny to see him trying so hard to get to the situation he desired.

“By the way, is that arm okay?”

“Ah, yeah, it’s fine since it doesn’t malfunction or anything.”

Hamin said that and fiddled with the prosthetic arm attached to his left side. It creaked quietly but exuded a presence that showcased it as a cool mechanical arm, drawing my attention.

“Hm~ I see.”

Just like Hamin did earlier, I responded playfully. It seemed that Hamin was picking up on my demeanor, adding hope because I hadn’t flatly rejected him.

As I was trying to find a place in front of the air conditioner, I slipped closer and looked up at Hamin.

“…But this is really just showering, right?”

“Uh, uh, of course…”

His answer was a bit lacking, but I nodded, hoping it was better than nothing.

Having brought extra clothes, I entered the changing room with Hamin. Staring blankly, I looked at Hamin standing beside me through the mirror.

“Come to think of it, it’s been a while.”

“What’s that?”

“Showering with Hamin. You used to help me shower before.”

“…That was…”

“Well, it couldn’t be helped. At that time, even though I had a waterproof prosthetic arm, my ability happened to be electrical, so I could have died the moment it discharged.”

I wasn’t someone who could berate him for something unavoidable. It was something I had already permitted, and there was no need to worry about it unnecessarily.

“Ugh, look at the sweat. We really need to wash up and roll around on the bed.”

Trying to escape the potentially awkward atmosphere, I quickly changed the subject and started taking off my clothes. The clothes I stripped off fell straight into the laundry basket, leaving only the n*ked me beside the still-standing Hamin.

“…What? Am I the only one showering?”

He asked me to shower together, and I took off my clothes, but it was ridiculous to see Hamin just watching. But perhaps it was just my gaze that caught him off guard, as he snapped back to reality.

“U-uh, I have to shower too.”

Hamin said that and soon became n*ked like me, and we entered the bathroom together.

Once inside, we washed up and took turns scrubbing each other’s backs while chatting about various things. The casual small talk soon turned into conversations filled with worries about the future, and we confirmed each other’s feelings to erase that anxiety.

The issue afterward was that I had to release Hamin’s revived s*xual desire with my hands.

Oh dear.

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“Seriously, if you can’t hold it in like this, why did you suggest we wash together?”

I grumbled as I left the bathroom. After roughly drying my hair, I tilted my chin up slightly and shook my head.

I felt my hair flowing behind me. After brushing it aside with my hand, I was now clean.

It was still bright outside, but the fact that I had washed up felt really good. The sunlight streaming in through the window was hot, but without the humidity, it was simply strong sunlight.

I could feel the heat beyond the glass, and the sound of cicadas filled the air. As I sat down on the sofa, feeling the breeze from the air conditioner, Hamin followed me out.

“I was feeling a bit sick before, so I had to endure it, but now I’m all better.”

A week before going to Orca’s house, he suddenly went to the hospital, and now it seemed he was claiming to be fine, but he still sounded somewhat wronged.

But isn’t it me who should feel wronged? It was Hamin who suggested washing together, and in the end, he couldn’t control his s*xual desire and had to resort to self-satisfaction.

Without condoms, and if we did it bare, I'd end up having to go to the hospital and get medication again, so I had to refuse forcefully. It was even infuriating how he casually expanded our options, claiming his hand was fine.

"But you never said where it hurts."

"That's a matter of my dignity…"

"Did you go to a psychiatrist or something?"

"No, really, I didn't. Please don't misunderstand."

At my serious question, Hamin waved his hand desperately to deny it.

Isn't there another hospital related to dignity other than a psychiatrist? It doesn't seem like a common place to go; then could it be for plastic surgery?

I glanced at Hamin's face. It didn't seem like that dignity issue. In fact, he was popular with other girls to some extent, so if his self-esteem was high, there didn't seem to be a problem.

It seemed like no matter how I spoke, he would dodge the topic and subtly brush past it, so I decided to let it go.

As I leaned back, I took up half of the sofa. Even though it was Hamin's sofa from his home, having lived here for a while, it felt comfortable, like it was mine.

Hamin just smiled even though I took up a lot of space. Even if his own space was slightly reduced, he didn't seem to get angry or uncomfortable at all.

"Aren't you tired?"

"…Who do you think made me this way?"

I stretched my feet toward Hamin, who was sitting at my feet. When I playfully pressed my toes down, he lightly grabbed my foot and ran his hand across my sole.

“Eek! That tickles!”

“Pfft.”

“No, what are you doing?”

I jerked and crossed my legs, and Hamin quietly let go of my foot, looking somewhat disappointed.

“Even though I’m already moving around so much and my arm is hurting, now you’re making me kneel in front of you and shake my arms, making it even harder.”

I said it playfully, and Hamin flinched. I urged him as if to push him further.

It was a kind of calculation on my part so that later, the sudden outburst of s*xual desire could be minimized.

Sitting up, I leaned my body toward Hamin.

In a position where I felt I could almost reach him, I braced myself against the sofa with my arm. Looking up at him, he was staring at me, unable to say anything, as if he were sweating coldly.

“Hey? Like, on your face too, huh?”

As I glared at him, Hamin averted his gaze. The relaxed expression he had just a moment ago disappeared, and he began to adopt a stiff posture as if to say he had done something wrong.

“I have nothing to say…”

At Hamin’s voice that came out at the end, I chuckled.

Was he anxious? His stiff metallic fingers near me twitched slightly. Seeing that made me laugh even more, and I couldn’t hold back.

I didn’t intend to keep bringing up the past or picking at him. I just thought to let it slide with a laugh, not to truly clear my conscience.

“There are times like that in life. Hamin’s s*xual desire is a problem, though.”

“…So you’re understanding that?”

“I understand, but in terms of actions, it’s a bit different.”

“Hmm…”

Hamin looked deep in thought. Perhaps he was trying to find a moment to say that he wanted to do it again with me. But even if he said so, I wouldn’t give in next time.

How many times does he need to be satisfied?

The s*xual desire was overflowing, and the one who created that situation was Yoon Hamin. Being together, he was hesitating to satisfy himself alone, all flustered.

So ultimately, I ended up taking care of it, but it took a while because I was so clumsy.

I was already swinging a sword around like that, and now swinging my arm again was exhausting, piling on fatigue to my body.

As I kept poking him, Hamin moaned. I captured that look in my eyes as I leaned against his shoulder.

A hard sensation touched my face. Since his forearm was made entirely of metal, it felt cold. There was no warmth or softness whatsoever.

Nonetheless, thinking that this arm was a badge that had protected countless people and heroes, I smiled.

Hamin stroked my head in silence. Unlike this cold forearm, his hand was soft and warm.

“Are you tired?”

“…Yeah.”

I surrendered my body to languor.

I was tired, had been moving around hard, and just came out after washing, so my body was warm. And with the air conditioner making the space cool without any heat.

Who would refuse sleep in such a situation?

As thoughts fluttered around, a vibration echoed somewhere. Realizing that the sound accompanying the vibration was the ringing of a call, my eyes snapped open.

I had just been about to fall asleep, and now it all felt shattered.

“What is it?”

“Oh, it’s a call… Teacher?”

At the word “teacher,” my body went stiff.

“Lucia teacher?”

“Uh, I just got a call from my homeroom teacher… Could it be news about failing due to attendance?”

“No way. By the way, since Lucia teacher called me, I guess I’m not expelled.”

“Let me take the call first.”

Hamin turned down the TV and held the device to his ear. The conversation that started with “Yes, teacher. This is Yoon Hamin” seemed to lead to various updates.

Seeing that Lucia teacher called, it seemed like he wasn’t expelled. But since I couldn’t tell if that applied to me as well, I wore a subtle expression.

Could it be that I am the one who got expelled…?!

No, it’s okay. The academy is just a place where I can have contact with Yoon Hamin. Just being able to build this relationship with him is already enough.

I thought a friendship would be nice, but I never expected it to develop like this.

“Yes, teacher… There hasn’t been any separate contact from the association, right? Yes, Kanna is with me. As for the current situation? Well, I’m not at the point where I can’t fight after getting a prosthetic arm with my own money.”

If he was asking about my well-being, it seemed like he hadn’t completely abandoned me. That could be my hopeful wish, but anyway.

After mentioning his situation, Hamin glanced at me.

“I think I’ll have to act separately since I need to be with Kanna. Huh? Protect? No, it’s not really a situation to trust, no. Yes.”

Hamin’s voice was quite firm. It seemed he was suggesting that since he would protect me, we should move together under the academy’s affiliation, but I opposed that.

Lucia teacher might be unaware, but Hamin and I had already faced too many dark aspects, so we couldn’t trust the idea of protection, and it was natural to want to distance ourselves.

“Yes, thank you for your concern. If it’s necessary to confirm identity rather than being a hero, then I’ll act separately while wearing my school uniform. Please rest comfortably.”

With those final words, Hamin ended the call and pulled the device away from his ear.

I watched and murmured.

“What was that? Saying we should fight together?”

“Well, it seems like that. It seems they plan to manage the students systematically, like before with the mentoring. I think they were asking whether I would fight or not.”

Hamin set the device down on the table.

“Since I’m not naive enough to trust in protection, I said I’d act separately. I might have to wear the academy uniform differently this time, but there’s no real issue with wearing it, so that’s okay, right?”

“That is true.”

There wasn’t an issue with wearing a uniform. Even if someone were to search for students, there wouldn’t just be one or two people in uniforms.

If someone recognized Yoon Hamin, it would probably be due to witnessing his abilities. But even if they knew, what could they do about it? No one would dare harm Hamin, who was already fighting hard for humanity.

Especially while he was fighting.

Unless it was for encouragement, there was no way they would ask, “Where are you, hurry and bring him inside,” that much was certain. So I nodded at Hamin’s choice.

“By the way, it seems the academy is preparing somewhat too.”

“Given the situation, they might not have any choice.”

At my words, Hamin clasped his hands together, looking deeper in thought.

“Still, it’s a relief that we’re not the only ones making an effort.”

I responded to Hamin’s remark with a bitter smile.

“Indeed, I hope everything goes well.”

Wishing for everything to turn out well.

Ch. 176 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 176

Most incidents occurred suddenly, often without any prior knowledge.

As a result, even with preparation, there were bound to be gaps, and it was an unavoidable reality that only response measures increased without preventative measures.

Responses could not be delayed beyond preventative actions. It was a given, but this time it wasn’t just about responding.

We were ready to cut off the source, neither responding nor preventing.

It takes time for Reika to gather monsters. Convincing Habar would certainly take time as well.

If it was said that we were unprepared in the meantime, it could only mean we were incompetent, foolish, and lazy for trying to gather too much on our own.

“We’re ready with the weapons. I think I have a handle on how to use them.”

The swordsmanship I had learned calmed my mind, thinking that having at least a weapon would help protect my life if my magical power were to disappear. Unlike the times when nothing remained without one, the presence of other supports gave me a feeling of stability.

“…I don’t know about the magical power.”

Right now, my body wasn’t capable of receiving magical power from within the barrier. Even when receiving refined magical power, there wasn’t much difference, so I didn’t feel a significant change.

If Reika or Habar came into the barrier and there was unrefined magical power flowing in from there, I could somewhat sustain myself, but it was wise to prepare since I couldn’t be sure of anything.

“What else do I need?”

I mumbled, trying to list the things I could quickly gather from the house. Ultimately, what was needed in a fight was just one weapon.

It wasn’t a grand war where countries clashed and soldiers were consumed while formulating strategies. Each day didn’t feel like hell, and there wouldn’t be a tragedy where one had to survive on a single onigiri.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle for us was fatigue. There wouldn’t be a choice like “Let’s take a nap and move on.”

It wasn’t a fight to sh**t bullets and step over dead bodies.

It was a fight to eliminate the main culprit, to prevent it from fleeing beyond the barrier, and to finish it once and for all. That was the essence of this operation.

I wasn’t sure of humanity’s goals, but Hamin’s and my objectives were clear. From now on, we would ensure that no monsters would break the barrier. Thus, we sought to reclaim a long-lasting peace once again.

I hoped there would be no more tragedies after this.

“Is it just the school uniform?”

Hamin murmured behind me.

“…Should I wear a school uniform too?”

“If we’re going to wear them, wouldn’t it be better to wear them together?”

“I suppose so.”

Contact from our teacher made us start preparing as if we were on the verge of something happening.

While it was possible to pick up the sword and go train again, feeling mentally prepared seemed to have a significant effect. It felt much more comfortable than wandering, unsure of what to do first.

“Speaking of which, it seems like Orca wants to fight as well. What will you do?”

I asked Hamin, who was standing beside me.

“…Orca would be much better off with the Academy students or with the Lamiris family than being with us, right? It’s safer, and also in terms of protection.”

It seemed unlikely that they would gladly let Orca join us just because she wanted to fight. Wanting to be together and encouraging each other was not a difficult thing to convey.

Yet, thinking realistically, it was better for those who could be safe to be in safe places. It wasn’t an intention to ostracize; it was a thought that arose from genuinely caring.

There was no need to d*e when there was no necessity to. The sense of loss from that was unimaginable. It felt painful. That shouldn’t happen.

If everyone around could d*e, and it was just the two of us who survived. Such thoughts did not linger in this place.

We wanted a conclusion where everyone was protected, the world found peace, and we embraced happy lives. We wished for such outcomes, hoping that those would not occur again.

“Should I ask once, though?”

However, I couldn’t impose such stubbornness on the other party. I wanted to hear Orca’s opinion. There were also cowardly excuses that perhaps she would feel more at ease if allowed to fight where she wished to fight.

“…If Kanna wants to do that, then do it. Honestly, I can’t say I can protect anyone because it’s dangerous.”

The mission given to him, who fought on the front lines, was to eliminate the enemy, not to protect someone. I knew that fact, and Orca probably knew as well.

There was no way to accept doing nothing when humanity’s fate was at stake. If I asked Orca, she would likely say she wanted to fight.

From the moment she mentioned her younger brother, whom she quietly nurtured in case of unforeseen circumstances, she felt a bit freer.

“Then can I call?”

“Are you going to do it, Kanna? Then use this.”

Taking the device handed to me, I stared quietly at the screen. I searched for Orca in the contacts and hesitated a moment with my finger. After a short while, I cautiously pressed the button.

The classic ringtone rang.

Orca picked up the call after it rang twice.

[Hello?]

“Oh, Orca. I have something I’d like to ask you this time.”

[Kanna? Is there something you need help with?]

“Maybe, I think so, or maybe I don’t…”

[What does that mean?]

It seemed like I needed help, but it wasn’t so urgent, and I just wanted to ask for her opinion, leaving my head feeling blank all of a sudden.

What should I start with?

I should have thought it through beforehand, but it was a situation of my own making due to being hasty. Still, Orca didn’t rush my silence. She just waited quietly.

Seeing her respond to silence with silence helped calm my anxious heart. There was no need to rush; I just needed to explain step by step.

“I’d like to ask you, Orca. Do you remember the conversation we had in that open area before?”

[…Yes, I remember. How could I forget?]

I recalled that moment in the open area. Hamin practicing diligently on the wide land, and the conversation I had with Orca as we stood in the shade came to mind.

“I was wondering if you’ve made a decision. If that monster comes again, I wanted to know which side you would choose to fight on. There’s the Academy, and there’s the Lamiris family, right?”

When I asked gently, Orca fell silent.

It was probably due to the interruption of the call, but if we had been face to face, it would have seemed like the right moment for her to contemplate seriously. Unintentionally, I pictured a serious-looking Orca and found myself waiting seriously as well.

[Well, whether it’s with the Academy or not, going for mentoring means I’m still part of my family, so it’s no different. I have a bit of freedom, though.]

Orca chuckled.

[As you said, since I’m not an only child, I don’t have to be that desperate. It’s purely my own ambition. I just wanted to reach out for more possibilities if I got that position.]

“You have a strong desire to win, Orca.”

[That’s right. I guess I thought this was a win.]

“But it’s not just that, right?”

Orca’s chuckle faded.

[…It’s truly frightening how much you know.]

I didn’t say anything in particular. I wasn’t hinting that I knew something; I just provided a clue.

Perhaps Orca thought I knew everything and let out a nervous laugh that felt like a confession.

[I’m sorry to frighten you. Even if I think you know a lot, it’s surprising to hear that you actually do. This isn’t something I can change…]

“I understand.”

[I’m truly sorry.]

“You don’t have to apologize. It’s only natural.”

If someone were to observe me, I might feel a bit of a chill. Orca must have felt something similar.

It’s even more frightening if someone was observing not just what was revealed, but also what was hidden or unsaid.

The already chilling situation became even more terrifying. I knew that fact, but given the situation, I was merely being honest and unreservedly speaking.

“I asked to see if you wanted to fight together. Are you a bit free right now?”

[Together…]

She couldn’t express her wish to fight together. She had run hard for her fragile younger brother at home, yet she hesitated to make such a choice at the end.

However, the fact that she had a younger brother ultimately freed her.

[I want to fight together. I want to go with you too.]

“You have to fight at the most dangerous front with Hamin.”

[Still, I want to fight together.]

Orca’s voice sounded firm. That beautiful voice, with a strong essence, seemed to reveal herself like a flower that no one could bend.

I couldn’t see her face. Yet, I felt as if I could see a determined gaze.

[I have a stronger desire to win than anyone else.]

Orca proudly revealed her desire to win, thinking of it as a source of pride.

Ch. 177 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 177

Orca had one concern.

It was worrying about how much she could contribute in the presence of Yoon Hamin and Kanna Aurora.

Considering Kanna’s track record, she wondered if she might not be the second strongest once she got there, but after realizing Kanna’s physical condition, she found herself unable to say anything.

The moment a monster broke through the barrier marked the beginning of the fight, and from that instant, Kanna would be accepting powers she had been unable to accept before, so she thought to herself that she would surely be strong in terms of fighting.

Even with Yoon Hamin being so strong, comparable to other heroes, thinking that Kanna was also strong made her worry that she would be in the position of receiving help rather than giving it.

She wondered if she might become an obstacle.

Despite those worries, she was unwilling to do nothing in a fight that determined the fate of the world. She didn’t want to simply retreat under protection, hesitating and then running away, ending it all like that.

Even if she felt inadequate, she could not step back. This might be the last chance.

Orca faintly sensed something without Kanna having to say it. She could feel that others, the heroes, and everyone in her family including her father,

were all worried and afraid.

The fact that this could be the last chance was something others besides Orca had already sensed.

“What should I take with me?”

She couldn’t tell exactly when. The choice was entirely in the hands of the monsters; when and where they would appear was solely up to them, and all heroes had to chase after that point.

It was even difficult because they might target more than one location simultaneously, creating confusion. She was fearful of how many monsters would come next and had to calculate whether or not it was something she could prepare for.

Even if they felt fear, they didn’t stop, perhaps because they were heroes.

As she watched them not stop, Orca also struggled to find her place, thinking that heroes are indeed heroes.

She worried that her efforts for her younger brother, who was weak and known only outside, might go to waste. But she also thought that when it all came to an end, whatever she had built would surely collapse like a sandcastle, so there was no sense in holding onto regrets.

The desire for competition, for the victory that could be obtained through it, was what currently lifted Orca.

There was an obsession that to protect someone, one had to be in a suitable place.

However, she didn’t feel that way now. It wasn’t necessary to sit in the top seat, and saving people didn’t require her to graduate and become a hero proudly.

Whether top or last place, those who were determined to do something clearly sought answers elsewhere.

They did their best and did not shy away from other paths, so Orca firmly believed that she could do the same.

Since her friends were both top and last, she stood up, thinking there was nothing she couldn’t do as the second. A staff was held in her hand.

The staff was smooth and straight, suitable for a conductor to use. Made of wood that transmitted magical power well and lacquered to shine a deep brown in her hand.

Orca filled the staff with magical power and stepped into an open area. She smiled, thinking about the enjoyable moments she trained with Yoon Hamin and Kanna.

Swallowing her memories, she resolved that she fought to protect those memories.

As Orca’s hand moved swiftly, her ability was unleashed at the tip of the staff where her magical power was gathered.

The land’s ability passed down in the Lamiris family. The foundation that had entrusted the management of the barrier to them was now revealed before her.

Orca’s abilities might be outstanding compared to other students, but in comparison to the company led by the Lamiris family or the elders of other families, there were numerous deficiencies.

Orca herself knew this fact and thus swallowed a hint of frustration.

If she were more capable, she wouldn’t have felt out of place even beside Yoon Hamin; she could have fought alongside Kanna or protected her when others came rushing in.

Such thoughts were soon her motivation to swing the staff again.

“Haah…!”

The ground surged upwards. She thought that just unbalancing the land where living creatures stood would be a significant blow, so she kept recalling things within her level that she could do.

The summer sun was hot. The sunlight piercing straight down scorched her skin. Even though she applied sunscreen, it wouldn’t stop the heat from reaching her, and groans escaped her lips.

Nevertheless, Orca did not stop.

Thud! Thud! With a loud vibration, a long rectangular pillar shot up from the ground. Orca swung her hand, sweating profusely and moving rapidly.

After raising the pillar, she considered it an enemy and moved swiftly. Knowing she couldn’t just stand in the battlefield swinging her staff, she even jumped.

Her feet made light, swift steps, and even amidst that, her hands accurately aimed for the pillar.

With a rumbling noise, the ground began to ripple. The pillars distorted as the shaking surface cracked and crumbled.

As Orca looked at the two pillars scattered on the ground, she made a subtle expression.

“I don’t think this will be enough…”

Wiping off the sweat dripping down, Orca thought again it might be better to approach in a new way and raised her staff.

July was already half over.

Tension lingered inside the barrier.

Countless cameras monitored the barrier, continuously running without shutting off, alert to any potential abnormalities.

The indiscriminate consumption of electricity raised concerns for humanity’s future, but the officials of the association, including the legislators, had no choice but to make a decision.

“Did you hear? They say to reduce the amount of power usage as much as possible.”

“In this summer, can you really not use the air conditioner?”

People complained about the immediate inconveniences they faced, yet within their complaints, fear clearly lurked.

The distributed pamphlets explained why electricity should be conserved, and the content was akin to a threat, making it a reality that they had no choice but to follow while grumbling.

[The operation of the cameras to prevent monster attacks greatly consumes humanity’s power. We request the assistance of citizens to ensure a smooth supply of electricity.]

Even after stating such, if people continued to use power indiscriminately, there might not be enough energy to operate the cameras. This meant they wouldn’t notice any anomalies, which could create an environment where it wouldn’t be strange for monsters to burst in.

Discontent was overshadowed by anxiety.

If they could survive against the monsters, it might be better to endure the summer. If dealing with the heat was manageable, that wouldn’t be so bad.

While some thought this way, there were also those who didn’t care and turned on their air conditioners, thinking they were one person, so what did it matter?

Yoon Hamin and Kanna were the same.

Until recently, they had been able to spend each day with air conditioning, but once they started avoiding using it, unbearably hot days began.

“Ugh, this is tough… At least I’m glad the refrigerator still works.”

Kanna took out ice that had been frozen in a PET bottle from the refrigerator. After wrapping it in a towel and placing it around her neck, she sighed. The coldness that tingled at her spine made her shut her eyes tightly as she moved to the living room.

“I should be staying indoors, but it’s so harsh…”

“It can’t be helped; if the cameras malfunction because of us, that would be a problem too.”

“Still…”

Kanna muttered but knew it was unavoidable and surrendered to the ice.

Right now, the only viable options were to endure with the ice taken from the freezer or take a cold shower; after all, the water itself was cold even in summer.

Kanna was sitting absentmindedly on the sofa when, perhaps realizing the ice wasn’t enough to cool her body properly, she suddenly lifted her head.

“…Ah, I can’t do this. I want to take another shower.”

“What? You said you were soaked in sweat after waking up this morning.”

“…But it’s hot, isn’t it? Aren’t you hot, Hamin?”

“Still, if you keep showering like that, won’t you catch a cold?”

“Is that so… then how about we shower together? It might be less cold if we’re together…”

At the mention of catching a cold, Kanna briefly did some mental calculations. She felt that if things went this way, Hamin wouldn’t allow her to wash, so she tossed out a suggestion that Hamin would find hard to refuse.

Hamin swallowed and nodded.

“Well… it might be a bit better if we wash together…”

Even though Hamin knew how he might look, he couldn’t help but dive in, thinking about how Kanna was the one who suggested washing together first.

Both of them, after showering in cold water, had to feel the heat once again. There was no one to provide a precise answer on how long this would continue, leaving them only feeling hot and stifled.

“I feel like I’ll d*e. I wonder if I’ll be able to sleep properly.”

As Kanna said that, worrying about the night that was approaching, she felt the ground rumbling beneath her.

“…?”

As the darkening night, the vibrating ground prevented people from falling asleep.

Ch. 178 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 178

After eating dinner and spending time watching TV, I was living a life that was truly the embodiment of a hikikomori until now.

I couldn’t go out unless it was a time when there were very few people around because I couldn’t be sure what would happen if I caught someone’s eye.

It would be nice if they didn’t try to grasp me like this. But unless someone from the Association suddenly came and told me, “I’m sorry, we won’t take you anymore, and we won’t torture you now,” I had to live every day in fear.

Moreover, even if they said that, the pent-up feelings wouldn’t just disappear, and instead, my fear would only amplify, so I was unwilling to think about what might happen.

I felt it would be painful if I had to live alone without Hamin. If I got expelled from the Academy, not only would the support funds get cut off, but if Hamin disappeared from there, thinking about using the little money I had to save and then dying alone with nothing felt terrifying.

Anyway, just when I was about to spend another day that seemed both familiar and unfamiliar, the vibration rang.

When my vision shook at first, I thought it might just be because I was drowsy and my head nodded. But when Hamin, who was next to me, glanced at me hesitantly, and I felt the vibration in my body, I realized it was something else.

Dudududud.

The screen of the TV that was on flickered with noise.

“What’s going on…”

I couldn’t help but think, could it be an earthquake? I’d rather they just told me it was an earthquake. But natural disasters don’t just happen randomly, so there was no way something like an earthquake that I didn’t know about would suddenly occur.

Just as running hard by a person doesn’t cause an earthquake, nor does it create a tsunami, it was just an absurd hope that vanished without expectation.

But how?

Even if it’s Reika, could she really draw Habar up this quickly? I feared I couldn’t figure out by what means Habar was persuaded.

Did she tempt him with food? Or a place to live? I couldn’t gauge what she offered Habar, who would be satisfied as long as his basic needs were met.

No, this wasn’t the time to think about such things. The ground was shaking right now, and outside, I could hear loud crashing noises starting.

“Kanna, wake up!”

Quick-witted Yoon Hamin sprang up from the sofa. Changing clothes was a matter of seconds.

I also put on the Academy uniform, following Yoon Hamin. It felt rather carefree to wear a uniform in this situation, but I had no choice since we couldn’t let anyone who wasn’t a hero fight on their own and we had to distinguish students.

It would be similar to wearing military uniforms when war breaks out. Of course, this wasn’t a battle that required us to be in uniform 24/7.

Putting on the uniform after a long time felt awkward. Since it was summer, and knowing it would likely tear anyway, I skipped the stockings and tied a blue ribbon.

“Let’s go.”

Hamin handed me a sword. Wielding the sword I received from Orca, I worried that the time for using it had come too soon.

“Hey, it’s me, Orca. Did you get the alert over there too? Okay, let’s meet at the terminal. Huh? You’re coming to my house? Got it.”

The moment we exited the front gate, Yoon Hamin tucked his communication device into his pocket.

“Orca just started putting on her uniform too. She said she’s borrowing the family car to send us toward the Barrier, so we should be able to get there quickly.”

“True, we have to wait to go to the terminal.”

“It’s quite troublesome since she opened another route different from before. The direction’s different.”

Hamin quickly started assessing the situation before Orca arrived.

He raised his head towards the place where the Barrier had broken down, where monsters could be seen as soon as he looked up. It seemed there was still some time left, so he pulled out the device to check various things.

“…All Academy students have been ordered to assemble. Those who aren’t going for mentoring can go to their assigned agency for the exercise training.”

“Maybe they realize this is really dangerous this time.”

Just as he said that, a flash of light scattered from beyond. It was the moment when the buildings illuminating the pitch-black world suddenly

went dark.

“What the?!”

As soon as I raised my head, Yoon Hamin groaned.

“It seems like it tore the power lines of the telephone poles.”

A bright flash went off, and the city that had looked bright just moments ago immediately lost its light. I could feel the situation worsening.

THUD THUD THUD sounded like something was tapping the sky. Helicopters were being deployed to support the scene; the overwhelming pressure was indescribable.

“Here they come.”

Hamin pointed with his finger. A black car swiftly approaching along the road came to a halt right in front of us.

“Get in quickly!”

I opened the back door and jumped into the car. Hamin sat in the passenger seat, while I took the right side of the back seat, following Orca.

The car quickly sped off towards the scene. During this time, Orca was fiddling with the tablet in her hand.

“What’s that?”

“This? It’s the information network provided to the Lamiris family. The camera doesn’t detect abnormalities and fulfill its role, you know.”

“But it seems like there was a power outage over there earlier.”

“…That’s frustrating, but at least we have some information, so it’s okay. We just have to piece it together.”

Orca, dressed in her uniform, scanned the screen with her blue eyes.

“For now, it says there are animal-type monsters, and it’s clear that they’re trying to exhaust our power like before. However, since the heroes have increased their stamina differently this time, they should manage to hold out until morning.”

“Orca, isn’t that too much? They’re going to d*e from overwork rather than from the monsters.”

Hamin smiled wryly and scolded.

“Even if they train, the total amount of magical power doesn’t change that drastically. If we can take down ten and fall back, that should be considered a good job, but squeezing any harder will only decrease efficiency.”

“…I’m not in a position to command anyway.”

“That’s true. Well, all the heroes are heroes anyway; they’ll manage on their own.”

She brushed it off as if it wasn’t something to worry about. It felt strange for a student aspiring to be a hero to worry about heroes, so I redirected my gaze out the window.

Beyond the swiftly passing scenery, I could see the lights shining on the monsters in the dark space.

The heroes closest to the scene were quickly using their powers as if they had begun to grab the monsters that had hidden in the darkness.

A bright explosion knocked the monster back. Along with that sound, a broadcast through the loudspeakers urged all the people in the city to leave the area.

Everyone heard the noise from the speakers and ran away. On the other side, the heroes charged towards the crowd fleeing in the opposite direction.

“…Huh, I’m nervous.”

Hamin took a deep breath, clutching the sword tightly in his arms.

“Is this really going to be the last time, right?”

Orca seemed to be looking for reassurance from me.

“Well, either way. The very fact that they’re attacking now means they’re confident enough to do so.”

I answered calmly. I tried to read the current situation. Wishing that this reading would be right, yet hoping it wouldn’t be at the same time.

Am I a fool to seek hope where I feel none?

“If Habar was persuaded, they’d want to give humanity time to reinforce their power, even if just for a moment. Judging by the fact that Reika herself has exhausted her abilities to the point of using the ultimate move against the monsters, Habar should definitely be around.”

I bit my fingernail.

“Whatever method she used, if she has managed to tempt Habar, then this time he will fight against humans. He won’t just lose consciousness after sticking twenty or more against Reika like before. It won’t end easily this time.”

I heard the sound of my teeth clashing. My anxious heart trembled greatly at that sound.

Danger signals flared up in my mind. But we weren’t citizens who had to run away from the alarms; we were the ones who had to approach them.

Like firefighters rushing into a fire, we had to dash towards the monsters, towards evil.

“Hamin, listen up. I’m going to explain the plan.”

I gently placed my hand on the front seat. Although it didn’t directly touch Hamin’s back, he seemed to sense something from being called and nodded.

“First, we can’t fight Habar right from the start. Given that monsters are already intruding and there’s Reika, going up against Habar first doesn’t make sense. For now, other heroes will hold the line, and we’ll wait for an opportunity.”

I casually glanced at Orca sitting to my left.

“Orca, please create space for Hamin to quickly deal with Reika. It shouldn’t be difficult since it’s not like I’ve injected abilities into Rendel.”

“You mean to isolate him from the other monsters, right?”

“Yes. If necessary, you can trap them in a sealed room. Anyway, Hamin will be fine in such a place.”

“Understood.”

I assigned a task to Orca that she could handle.

“Hamin will be fighting Reika the moment he gets isolated, and the key factor is how quickly he can take her down. If she has some odd monster like before and spits it out, we’re in trouble, but if anything resembling a totem is visible in her hands, you can respond immediately, right?”

“…I’ll try. I’m prepared to part with at least my prosthetic arm again.”

“No, don’t give away your prosthetic arm unless it’s absolutely necessary.”

I clapped my hands. It felt like the atmosphere inside the car paused.

“If you gain magical power, I’ll help you as much as I can… Let’s go for now.”

The car came to a stop. There was no turning back now.

As we burst out of the doors, the vehicle retraced its path into the distance. The flickering lights illuminated a massive figure, its outline blurred in the darkness, thudding heavily on the ground.

We hid in the shadows, keeping watch for the right moment.

Ch. 179 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 179

The being called a monster was once human. Habar was also human.

Once that classification was made, Habar became the strongest among all humanity. Although he didn’t know it for long, he didn’t seem particularly interested in it, spending his days blankly.

Then one day, Reika began visiting him constantly to talk.

“Habar. Aren’t you uncomfortable?”

“…What do you mean?”

As soon as Reika began her teasing, Habar let out a deep sigh.

He didn’t have much feeling for humanity in general. Since he knew nothing about them, he couldn’t have either good or bad emotions toward them.

He knew nothing. Remembering that fact, Reika approached Habar and spoke.

“I heard that beyond the wall, there are beds. They say when you sleep on a hammock like you do, you can stretch out comfortably in a nice place.”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“They have the technology to stay cool even in this hot weather, and warm during cold days. But what about us? We’re stuck in a constant life of cold, heat, and hunger.”

It was a very simple story. If someone else heard it, they might just think, “How envious. So that exists?” But Reika was explaining it slowly.

“The humanity inside expelled us because we can stay outside. They felt threatened because we were oddly strong. So, this is all we have left, isn’t it? Doesn’t that make you angry?”

“…I’m not angry. It just is.”

Habar looked indifferent, but she piqued his interest slightly.

Not in a way that she was trying to instill some kind of hatred, but in a way that indicated he could comfortably sleep.

The sleeping options here were divided into two: hammocks and the ground. Lying flat on the ground was uncomfortable because it was hard and cold, but going up to the hammock would make him curl up slightly and feel stiff.

He had intentionally stayed in the hammock, giving up on lying flat, but he now thought how nice it would be if there were a bed, closing his eyes and imagining it.

“Think about it. We’re the victims. We’ve lost so much that we’ve become fools who don’t even know what was taken from us.”

“…Fool?”

Habar, hearing the word ‘fool’ from Reika, cast her a displeased glance.

With a start at his glaring red eyes, Reika swallowed hard and continued.

“We’ve lost our home, and our right to live normally. We were sent out to d*e without any rights or duties, yet because we survived, we’re called monsters. After taking everything from us.”

Reika spoke as if delivering a speech before Habar.

“…I haven’t lost anything.”

“Maybe our previous generation lost everything, leaving you with nothing to lose. All you have left is that ignorant strength and this hammock, do you think humanity would covet that?”

Reika spoke with a tone that seemed half mocking.

Even if she brought out every monster she had, fighting Habar would still be tough, but she thought she had to throw caution to the wind and struck out at Habar aggressively.

“It’s our turn to take back. If we take it properly just once, you really won’t have to work anywhere in the future.”

It was tempting. The notion that if he just endured and risked everything once, he could lead a life like this moving forward was somehow alluring.

No matter how bothersome it was, desire was still desire, and Habar, responding honestly to it, fell silent for a moment.

“…Just once. But if it fails, I’ll twist your neck.”

“Of course.”

Against Reika, who clung to him so annoyingly, Habar growled. Reika, startled, stepped back.

Yet inside, she was happy to have succeeded in persuading him. She thought that now all that was left was to go and win.

Despite knowing this was a clumsy persuasion, she felt satisfied just to have gotten Habar to move.

*

They had to find the monster, not the beast. The beasts could be handled by heroes, but as Kanna mentioned, they needed to k*ll the true instigator of this situation, the monster Reika.

Hearing that a monster named Habar, whom he had only heard about, was approaching filled him with an unusual fear.

Yet, listening to Kanna, she didn’t seem like the type to come at him with such aggressive hostility. What kind of story did she tell to make him side with this Reika?

Many thoughts went through his mind, but ultimately, resolving the immediate situation was the priority.

He drew his sword from the weapon rack and stared. People were fiercely fighting with their weapons, and flashes of light and loud sounds stole away his sight and hearing.

At that moment, a pitch-black blade hidden in the darkness trembled. Holding the sword that began to resonate with his magical power, he heard Orca ask from behind.

“…Who is Reika?”

“I’ll let you know. She has somewhat long hair, but you’ll know immediately when you see her, so I’ll make sure to tell you before we set off.”

“Alright. I’ll separate her from the others as Kanna said, so Yoon Hamin, you must win!”

“Feeling a bit heavy on the shoulders.”

He said with a playful laugh.

Orca seemed to understand that he was making a comment to lighten the overly heavy atmosphere and simply smiled back.

“Has Kanna hidden well?”

“Yes, for now, she temporarily left to replenish her magical power in a safe place. Don’t worry. She lent me her backup device, so if something

happens, I can contact her there.”

“That’s a relief.”

In this situation, no one would take Kanna with them anyway, so as long as they didn’t get attacked by the monsters or the beasts, they should somehow manage.

He supposed that trusting Kanna was the only choice.

“…Phew, I’m a bit nervous. It’s scarier since I’ve fought directly.”

“Is she strong?”

“Not so much strong as annoying; I’m worried she might do something strange and then run away at the end. If I let her slip away now, I’ll have to be scared of her again in the future.”

He stood here with the thought that he had to uproot the source. But if he couldn’t cut that root, this fear would linger forever.

He hated that so much that he hoped he could truly finish it this time.

According to Kanna, she would push through until destruction, but in truth, Kanna was not completely sure. It was happening now, as summer vacation approached, rather than waiting until he became a third-year student.

If that’s the case, could she not run away as Kanna had said?

What if the being destined to destroy humanity used this as an opportunity to return stronger after scouting once?

Thinking that way only intensified his fear. He truly felt that he couldn’t let this slip away.

Resolution, sense of duty, will. When they began to coalesce and solidify, he spotted a small silhouette among the enormous forms. Orca seemed to have spotted it at the same time and asked him.

“Is that it?!”

“…Wait a moment, not yet. There might be other monsters.”

It was still far, making it hard to gauge how big that figure was. With only monsters around for comparison, it felt like perspective was lost.

As he looked, a larger figure appeared from behind.

What if Rendel, the monster, was there? But with that physique and hair…

“Oh, that’s it!”

“Is it the monster following behind?”

“Uh, let’s approach stealthily without being noticed first. Set up a barrier the moment they separate.”

“Understood.”

Not long after, the monster revealed itself. There were two figures, just like before.

The smaller one seemed to be Habar, not Rendel, who was known for absorbing abilities, while he wondered if the other one had not come yet.

He thought that if they were ambushed suddenly after hiding at the back, that would cause difficulties, so he decided to observe the timing once more.

If they were planning to enter, they would surely have to do so at some point.

“…Huh, ha.”

He took a deep breath a couple of times.

“Alright.”

The night had only just begun. The darkened sky, and the city dimmed by the blackout were illuminated by shimmering abilities of others.

And he possessed that ability as well.

“Altair.”

The alpha star of Aquila.

At the moment he called upon the star, it sparkled in response from the sky. Beneath the beautifully glowing star, he felt as if wings sprouted from his body as he stood with the sword in hand.

He wouldn’t actually fly, but it felt like if he pushed off the ground, he could leap much further.

The pitch-black sword reacted, absorbing light. A bright yellow light glimmered at the tip of the blade where he couldn’t properly discern the outline in the darkness.

“I’m going.”

“Then, I’ll begin.”

At his signal, Orca drew her staff. Slowly, slowly. The moment to strike came, Orca took a deep breath and exhaled.

With that as a signal, he kicked off the ground. He trusted Orca, and as a result, faced the wall that would separate the two figures.

On the right was Habar, on the left was Reika. He would cut down the main culprit first.

“Gah!”

He held his breath and swung his sword. Like an eagle snatching at its prey, the black claws of his sword rushed toward Reika’s neck with speed.

“Hah… you.”

Crack.

With astonishing reaction speed, Reika raised her right arm, and her wrist was torn away. Yet even in that moment, she only slightly frowned and swung her left hand.

The totem was thrown toward him, and the fear he had faced before greeted him. The one responsible for tearing his arm off.

Determined not to let it happen again, he twisted his wrist and slashed at the totem.

The severed totem shattered into powder, but whether the monster inside had been cut down with the totem or if it had been a ploy to buy time for just a moment, Reika's foot flew toward him through the frame of the swung sword.

"Guh…!"

"If I fight in my best condition, I'll win."

Ch. 180 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 180

Sel grasped her sword and surveyed her surroundings. Even the students who weren't mentoring had entered the agency to receive commands, yet she couldn't see Yoon Hamin, who was supposed to come as her mentee, and let out a groan.

She felt as though something was amiss, but not knowing what it was only made her feel frustrated.

She had reached out once or twice, but unlike before, she hadn't received any replies. She speculated that it might have been around the time when he came to the agency requesting a totem to heal Kanna Aurora.

"Hm."

"…What are you doing? You need to move to your position quickly!"

A colleague called out to Sel. She wanted to say, 'I'm waiting for my mentee,' but the absence of a response to her earlier messages dominated her thoughts, leading her to believe he wouldn't come.

A few weeks ago, when everyone was exhausted and ready to retreat from the monster's attack, he suddenly appeared, confronting the monster on the front lines, and she heard that he had lost an arm.

She knew it was due to Yoon Hamin's ability, and shortly afterward, a gigantic sea monster charged in as if to crush the world, making it feel fortunate that he had only lost an arm.

As various thoughts crossed her mind, she couldn’t shake the feeling of unease knowing that a student she was connected to had fought with d*ath on the line and lost an arm.

“I’ll go for now.”

She wished that this time he would at least show up and greet her to let her know he was okay.

However, at this moment, what she needed wasn’t such sentiments but rather the determination to overcome the current situation. Taking a deep breath, she exhaled, and the intense blue heat that seemed like it could turn the already hot weather into ash enveloped her body.

Clang! Tossing her unsheathed sword to the ground with a lively sound, she stepped forward alone.

The heat cutting through the air surged forward, drawing a sharp line with dazzling light as it sliced through the monster. Her swift swordsmanship, delivered without a rustle or hindrance, was enough to grab the attention of other heroes right away.

As she cut through the monster, she leaped onto its back and aimed her sword at what would presumably be its heart, releasing a torrent of heat.

The blue flames illuminated the area even without additional lighting.

Kieeeek!

The monster let out a scream. The ear-piercing sound twisted Sel’s expression, but only for a moment.

The size of the monster wasn’t too overwhelming, allowing Sel’s sword to inflict a wound. By the time she inflicted another wound, she was fortunate to reach the core within due to her skill.

Whether the time to reach the core shortened according to the monster’s size was the most critical issue.

The quicker the monster was taken down, the shorter the time the heroes had to engage, naturally reducing their fatigue and making it easier for them since there were fewer monsters to be concerned about.

A relatively small monster could be smashed into its core with just one sword, and for seasoned heroes, one hero would suffice.

But for a gigantic monster, that was impossible. With the infiltration of unrefined magical power, regeneration could happen, meaning many heroes had to gather together to deliver deep wounds quickly.

“Ugh…”

As Sel swallowed her breath, a man’s voice came from behind.

“The blue flames are always noticeable.”

“Asrad!”

“I’ll be your foothold.”

Asrad held his sword and moved his hands quickly.

Having often worked in tandem before, Sel nodded at Asrad’s words and kicked off the ground.

The body of an Awakened One can exert incredible strength, unlike that of an ordinary person. However, even there, limits exist, and the altitude one can reach while jumping varies.

Still, with Asrad around, she could jump once more.

Sel kicked off the ground and leaped high into the air. At the peak, slightly delayed in timing, she extended her foot. Simultaneously, Asrad’s ability exploded in midair.

The pressure of the air explosion pushed Sel’s foot away, serving as a springboard that propelled her even higher.

Riding the momentum of the explosion, Sel soared high into the sky, quickly spinning in the air while swinging her sword.

A green ring, seemingly conjured in the sky, began to gash the monster's neck with her swift rotations.

The creature, in the form of a giraffe and hastily brought around by Reika, fell limp, unable to bear the weight as Sel's sword split its neck.

With a staggering crash, the monster fell to the ground where Asrad's sword pierced its heart and scattered it into the air.

"…Hmm, it seems easier than before?"

Asrad remarked, as Sel approached, landing with a foot on the monster's body.

"Well, there are strong monsters too."

"It would have been nice if you had told me you got stronger."

"No way."

Sel smiled playfully as she moved on.

Her body lightly bounced into the air, and the blue flames soared skyward, capturing everyone's attention as she fell. Each time she did, the monster's body either burned or staggered from the impact, causing the other heroes to hastily focus on eliminating the beast.

"This one's mine!"

While Sel was active, Asrad swung his sword at a monster that appeared to be two to three meters tall from another direction.

The sound of compressed air explosions resounded one after another, momentarily obscuring the monsters' vision.

Including Sel and Asrad, numerous heroes were in the midst of pushing back the monsters. As time progressed, more and more people began to sense something was off.

“Isn’t this strange?”

“It seems like there are fewer monsters than before.”

“Maybe it feels like that…”

These were heroes who had previously fought with their lives on the line. The threats they personally faced were instilled with fear, yet conversely, they set a standard that such preparations were necessary.

They had come prepared not to waste the deaths of their fellow comrades, knowing that if they approached carelessly, it would inevitably be their own deaths.

In any case, compared to the standard they’ve built within themselves, the current situation was undeniably odd.

The monsters weren’t as threatening overall. Most were carnivorous, or extraordinarily large creatures.

While a few threatening monsters emerged, they looked at what had just been killed and the ones they needed to k*ll, and it became evident that the danger was lower and the numbers fewer, making it seem manageable.

“Could this just be a warning? Just like last time, they might suddenly pull something bizarre in the end.”

“Hey, look over there!”

As the heroes gripped their weapons and tried to decipher the situation, a gigantic wall arose in front of the barrier.

It was a massive wall that seemed to block the gaps of the barrier that had just collapsed. The lights held by the people rushed toward the wall, but

already the gaps had been hidden from view.

“I can’t see the monsters! Is this the work of the villains?”

As the tension among the people heightened, the lights moved towards someone right in front of the wall.

Black hair, red eyes. A girl with a somewhat smaller stature caught their attention.

Habar.

“What…”

Habar was startled to see a wall suddenly erected between her and Reika.

Having no prior knowledge of humanity within the wall, her reliance on Reika as a guide surged her panic.

As she was about to punch through the wall Orka had created, the lights instantly shone on Habar, and her clenched fist was tightly wrapped with a sturdy ribbon.

“Get her!! We need to k*ll her before she escapes the wall!!”

The heroes shouted, believing this was their opportunity. It was a reasonable thought, seeing the monster behind them appearing flustered with its escape route blocked.

All at once, attacks flew. In this moment, firearms were drawn.

Those who never used firearms because the monsters had skin too thick for bullets were more than willing to use them against a villain.

“Binding complete!”

The ribbon, while remaining pliable, tightened fiercely, making it nearly impossible to escape as it ensnared Habar. At the same time, the oppressive

force pressed down on Habar’s shoulder, and the binding ability attempted to wrap around her.

Firearms under the management of the association were gripped tightly in hand, and heroes with useful abilities focused on a singular target in their sights.

“I’ve got a lock. Ready to sh**t on your signal.”

Eliminating the monsters felt easier than before. Although there had been some villages that had collapsed due to delays, there hadn’t been many casualties, and thanks to their rapid response, they were close to eliminating the villains shortly after the start.

With that in mind, their gazes focused on one point.

“Fire!”

At that moment, the flames invented by humanity roared, echoing like thunder in their ears.

Simultaneously, a cloud of dust was kicked up.

A weapon capable of killing its target with a single finger, suggesting d*ath, blared loudly. With one person firing multiple rounds, and over ten doing so, the noise became overwhelming.

“Cease fire!”

As the dust that filled the surroundings began to settle, Habar’s figure was revealed.

The bindings that had captured her had all been cut, and the force pressing down on her shoulders failed to force her to her knees.

Moreover, the hero who had held her arm was unable to withstand her momentum and flew over, inadvertently taking the b*llet instead, leaving them unrecognizable.

Even so, it seemed that not everything was stopped, as Habar clicked her tongue and looked at the lights surrounding her.

“Such a predicament.”

Ch. 181 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 181

Habar rushed to break the wall quickly. However, each time he did, people shot at him multiple times.

Habar hesitated for a moment but then picked up the corpse he had used as a meat shield earlier to block the bullets. The heroes had no choice but to stop firing.

Even so, he couldn’t help but question whether it was right to sh**t at a corpse, and his fingers came to a halt.

Although Habar had no lessons on ethics, he was not a complete psychopath oblivious to d*ath. But with bullets flying towards him, he had no choice but to shield himself with the corpse.

He couldn’t easily lower the corpse knowing that bullets would rain down again once he did, yet he desperately wanted to smash the wall with his bare fists.

Enraged by Habar, the heroes contemplated drawing their swords and stopping their gunfire.

However, that contemplation didn’t last long. Regardless, the corpse was going to be shredded by bullets. And since fighting with swords without using guns would put them in danger like before, they chose to respond with firearms.

It was ethically questionable. Knowing they should bury the corpse and hold a funeral, they felt guilty about leaving more scars on it and making it

unrecognizable, but ultimately, they closed their eyes and fired the shots claiming it was for humanity's sake.

"Ugh…"

Habar sighed in frustration, thinking that using the corpse for defense could create openings.

The corpse was becoming more and more shredded, and bullets flew through the gaps, trying to pierce her body.

Although it couldn't completely tear through his robust body, Habar felt pain just like anyone would when hit by bullets, even while wearing a bulletproof vest.

"Fire! I will take the responsibility…!"

The heroes' mournful voices leaked out.

Both the shooters and the one who ordered the shooting swallowed the pain and sought forgiveness.

As if trying to bind Habar's feet, he pressed himself against the wall to break it. In this position, he couldn't create an opening with the meat shield, so he prioritized withstanding the bullets and breaking through the wall to join Reika.

"Don't let them escape!"

Although the heroes did not fully understand the situation, their desire to join Reika looked to them like an attempt to flee, and they struggled to keep Habar restrained.

"A barrier ability user is protecting the wall! Block the escape route, don't let them out again!!"

It was likely a hero who had erected the barrier. Thinking so, Habar put in more effort.

Caught between the relentless attacks from the invading people, Habar found himself unable to move and gnawed at his teeth, unable to hide his awkward expression.

Behind them, an unknown battle raged on in the back of the stage.

The barrier Orca had set up separated light from darkness, while Yoon Hamin, left alone in the darkness, clashed with Reika.

“I played with fire last time, but do you think you can be my opponent now?!”

Reika said this as she put the totem in her mouth.

Be it human or monster, it was basic to absorb magical power and store it within one’s body. However, Reika went beyond merely containing magical power in her vessel; she could also store reserves elsewhere.

She was able to avoid the situation where excess magical power would simply disappear and no longer be hers.

That was a great advantage that could not be seen as a flaw in any aspect.

Yoon Hamin looked at this and casually yet passionately swung his sword. The violently moving blade aimed to cut down any foe, regardless of whether they were human or something else.

The flashing blade sought to blind Reika’s vision as it engulfed the light.

Reika realized this and tightly shut her eyes, rolling the totem in her hands. Since she had no more monsters at her disposal, she had to fight using magical power alone.

Beyond the wall, the monsters she had created were still entering, but that was merely a matter of time until they run out.

Reika knew this fight was a reckless gamble based on trusting Habar. However, she could not back down. She had planned to spend days or

months persuading Habar, but now that she had accepted this, she had to finish it in one go.

She didn’t even want to imagine how long it would take for Habar to change his mind again if it were to change.

“Ugh!”

Reika’s hardened fist targeted Yoon Hamin’s face.

He twisted his body to avoid it and immediately followed through, pivoting to swing his sword from the opposite side.

Kaaang!

Reika’s foot, moving like a skilled dancer, deflected the sword.

Yoon Hamin frowned at this but did not yield and maintained his stance.

“Castor!”

The summoned star sparkled. Though everyone was busy and there was no time to see the star, it surely shone brightly within him.

The alpha star of the constellation Gemini beautifully illuminated the world and simultaneously lent its strength to Yoon Hamin.

“As if a minor technique will…!”

Reika gritted her teeth and hurled the totem. The totem, prepared for an explosion, flew through the air.

There were five of them, thinking that they needed to create enough that could not be avoided to make cutting down easier.

The reason why Reika’s words trailed off was that Yoon Hamin’s sword seemed to double for just a moment.

Until just now, he had one body and one sword, inherently subject to physical limits, and the aim of the fight was to exploit those gaps. However, Yoon Hamin now fought as if he had gained an afterimage, wielding two swords.

He slashed through the totem flying towards his blind spot and quickly closed in on Reika, positioning his sword at her neck, startling her.

She vowed not to let her guard down. But the display of such versatile abilities raised doubts about how she could avoid becoming careless.

What could he do and what could he not do?

Without realizing it, she had not considered it, and if Yoon Hamin managed to do something again, she would once again become careless.

Reika unknowingly fell into a psychological war, even though Yoon Hamin had made no effort in that regard.

“Aldebaran…!”

She had come close enough. As Reika attempted to block the sword entering her neck with her hands, she doubled down on her momentum.

The force gathered for a sudden charge was sufficient to press the sword against Reika’s neck.

Kwaduk.

The blade, which seemed as if it wouldn’t penetrate steel, buried itself into Reika’s hand.

Both Yoon Hamin and Reika opened their eyes wide. The hope of being able to do this, the thrill pushed Yoon Hamin, while at the same time, Reika was taken aback by the fact that this blade was digging into her body.

“Metal imbued with magical power…!”

It was too strange, Reika thought, her gaze fixated on the sword. Simultaneously, she realized that her ungripped left hand was an unusual pitch-black color, unlike a human's.

She would have thought that it had been devoured by a megalodon, so why was it back to normal?

Being a monster, she realized too late that it naturally regenerated upon receiving magical power, and Yoon Hamin's left arm's return was what posed danger to her.

That now pushed Reika into a corner.

Veins bulged on Yoon Hamin's neck. He exerted himself desperately, determined to sever her neck and fulfill his will.

"Ugh…!"

Kakakakak.

It was a somewhat grotesque sound that pierced through the air rather than the sound of skin being sliced.

"Downpour!"

Stars rained down on Reika like a barrage. Glistening in the aftermath of the impact, it flickered like flash grenades.

Yet, the shock was still delivered, and Reika's knees trembled, her body lowered further. As she shivered, her knees were beginning to buckle more and more.

Boom, kwuuung! Boom!!

The wall Orca had erected shook violently. Realizing that Habar was breaking through the wall to join them, she hurried.

"Sirius…!"

A powerful starlight flashed.

The most potent starlight.

Even those deeply engaged in battle paused momentarily to look skyward at the intense sparkle.

Yoon Hamin’s arm, endowed with power, was now bulging with veins, and the muscles surged. The sword lunged like a tooth, aiming to bite down on the opponent’s neck.

“Ughggh… Habar…!”

Reika, unable to flee from Yoon Hamin’s overwhelming force, felt the blade pressing ever closer to her neck and called out for Habar in panic.

Reika realized she had misjudged. She was thinking of crushing him, but now she understood she should have kept him at bay instead.

Had she summoned a monstrous creature like a megalodon to devour everything at once, it might have been different, but how could one escape with such versatile abilities targeting her neck?

Feeling the blade increasingly press against her neck, Reika waited for her moment to trigger an explosion of unrefined magical power, the destructive magical explosion that had previously slain twenty foes.

This was a decision made knowing that Habar could not help due to the wall blocking them.

Releasing the hand blocking the sword, she brought her palms together momentarily. With a clap, a sound echoed, and simultaneously, the totem that had been within Reika was absorbed and then erupted.

An explosion formed a spherical shape around Reika. The purple glow engulfed Yoon Hamin’s vision.

Ch. 182 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 182

Hamin and Orca are fighting. What I needed to do here was to protect myself. Of course, since it was a rule set so that Hamin and Orca wouldn’t worry, it could change depending on the situation.

What I needed to do now was to check Habar’s condition.

The Habar I knew had developed a hatred for humanity after being taught by Reika for three years, leading him to be busy killing humans until their destruction.

It was the moment when the learned vengeance and anger spread in Habar.

In the end, it was Reika’s mouth that was the problem, but after she finished her part, Habar would become the most challenging issue to resolve, so I was just worried.

If Orca and Yoon Hamin could handle Reika first, then the remaining forces could focus on Habar, so I hoped for that and surveyed the surroundings.

Even now, as Habar drew attention, Reika behind the wall didn’t reveal herself, so all interest was focused on Habar.

The problem was how to deal with a Habar like that; he seemed like a being that bullets couldn’t penetrate.

It almost felt as if guns were weapons solely aimed at humanity, but there was no complete avoidance, as Habar’s body flinched slightly.

After all, it made sense that bullets could carry a certain amount of magical power or be endowed with special abilities.

“Uaaaaah!”

As Habar flailed his arms and struggled, I felt an overwhelming presence for a moment.

At the same time, I stepped down onto the ground. With a crack, the ground distorted. No Awakened One had distorted the ground like that before, and Habar’s kick demonstrated a different dimension.

“No, where did he go…?!”

I had come this far to check Habar’s condition, but the moment I got close, Habar flew away.

I had a duty to know whether he truly harbored animosity towards humanity or if it was merely a hastily constructed anger, but if he moved out of my sight, it would be impossible to plan.

Moreover, if he went behind the wall, Hamin could be in danger, so my pace grew anxious.

However, such feelings didn’t last long. In contrast, there came the sound of an explosion, making me think that the creature had fired a cannon. The upper part of a building was shrouded in dust and debris fell to the ground.

“He charged upwards!!”

“Drop the lights! Drop them on the ground! It seems like he’s charging at the lights!”

The heroes shouted. Among the people were students, like me, wearing white uniforms.

I briefly caught sight of that and lifted my head; a corpse dropped from above. The already dead body fell without moving and scattered despair.

“Don’t…”

I should have exploited the monster’s moment of hesitation, but the guns, which I thought would work, couldn’t stop Habar, who was charging with his eyes closed.

If I had dug into his skin instead, perhaps I wouldn’t have died so soon, I thought.

Habar didn’t prioritize contact with Reika. Was it rage against humanity that took precedence? Or was he planning to eliminate all of the light their people possessed for the future?

Without light, people’s visibility drastically narrowed. That situation would be very favorable for the few remaining Reika and Habar.

In that case, it made sense that he attacked the lights first.

Boom!

Once again, the rooftop of the building with lights shattered. Habar had now reached a point where it was difficult to confirm from where I was.

Thud! Crash!

Amidst the discarded lights, the shadow of a falling corpse flickered. At the same time, the lights that had fallen to the ground shattered, and the body, having lost its light, was swallowed by the shadow and received no gaze.

Cold sweat trickled from my hand.

Could I have instilled hatred in Habar during this brief time? Have I generated animosity toward humanity?

While thinking it was nonsense, a fear arose, wondering what if this situation made no sense at all. There was no guarantee that expectations and reality would align, as it was more common for things to go awry; thus, I shouldn’t cling to it.

What I could do right now. In fact, it was for the heroes to handle their own affairs. My job was to assess the situation and return to where Hamin and Orca were to devise a new strategy.

Habar's condition was abnormal. I hadn't even had a chance to get close and check.

Was he stopped when he tried to approach Reika? But rather than returning to join forces beyond the wall Orca had built, he first attacked the people shining lights and those aiming guns from the rooftops.

This wasn't rage; it was likely to ensure his comfort while acting within the barrier later.

If so, could I consider it trust in Reika?

Yes, trusting was preferable. We would think about how to exploit that trust.

As the lights fell one by one to the ground, the people lost their light. Some who thought it would be challenging to continue the fight without light held on, but soon fell to the ground, dead with the lights.

The light completely vanished.

What we could rely on was the faint light spilling in from other cities or the gentle moonlight and starlight coming down from the sky. If not that, then perhaps abilities, but any blatant effort to illuminate would soon become a target for Habar, so caution was necessary.

I swallowed nervously and ran back.

I felt like I might lose direction as it got darker, but I ran hard, searching for faint outlines.

"Habar, Habar…"

Can I stop Habar? What kind of state is Hamin in right now?

It was difficult to make an objective judgment.

The measure of strength that reveals itself only through confrontation cannot be understood by observing just one side. Moreover, it would be impossible to say to try just once, as the outcome would be determined after the first clash.

How to stop Habar as he rampaged like that? What kind of plan should I make?

There seemed to be no weaknesses. Unlike Reika, who's accustomed to headquarters and weak in close combat, Habar wasn't just an ordinary monster whose abilities would be expelled by a blow to the stomach.

He was a being that had risen to the apex solely based on physical prowess. Close combat against such a being was nonsensical; however, if the distance were widened, he could swiftly close it again, creating a difficult situation.

A single person could be the reason the world perished.

The strongest was someone who made that reason palpable.

Abilities that shone in the dark flickered, lighting up the darkness, but the shadow crossing that light soon killed a hero.

Screams were heard. The moment one shines in the dark, they d*e. In a situation where nothing could be seen well, the sound of bodies being crushed and screams pricked my ears.

Fear spread gradually, and the heroes began to refrain from using their light-emitting abilities.

Leaving that behind, I rushed to Orca and called her name.

"Orca…! Are you there?!"

"It seems like the situation isn't good… All the lights have fallen, so I can't move recklessly."

“Yes, in the end, Habar has begun to exert himself. I can’t grasp the situation clearly, but it seems he intends to cause havoc from inside as Reika wishes.”

At my words, Orca groaned.

“If this continues, Yoon Hamin might become isolated and be in danger. We need to create light immediately…”

No way. If we create light, they will immediately aim to extinguish that light, right? Then, every time there’s such an attempt, people will d*e. Isn’t there a good method?

Is it feasible to emit light without any people around? There wouldn’t be lights that don’t break…

“Ah! Then could we ask for flares? Couldn’t we ask the family for that?”

“Flares? If so, let’s call for support right away.”

“But don’t fire them immediately. We need to wait until Hamin defeats Reika to fire them.”

“…Understood.”

If the stars were obscured by light, even abilities would weaken; that would be a disaster in itself. At the very least, we needed to wait until Reika was defeated.

“However, can Yoon Hamin defeat the monster called Reika alone? Most heroes seem to be struggling against one monster right now?”

“…Reika is fine. Habar is the problem. From what Orca saw, it doesn’t look like the monsters came rushing in like before, right?”

“That’s certain…”

I briefly glanced at Orca, who was tapping on the device’s screen. The small light given to us revealed our expressions.

They looked anxious.

“Even if the abilities of a commander are good, if he approaches now, Yoon Hamin will gain the upper hand. I told him not to hold back fighting Reika, so it should be fine.”

Orca nodded as if she understood. However, her expression didn’t relax. Her anxious heart remained.

“Then when we put forth all our strength, can Yoon Hamin defeat Habar? Or does all the hero’s power have to concentrate in one spot?”

I felt a desperate desire for a path in either case.

“I don’t know, but probably not the former.”

I had to tell her the bad news.

Ch. 183 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 183

Yoon Hamin couldn’t resist as an orb-shaped explosion erupted around Reika.

A purple flash occurred in a place where no one was watching. Kanna was startled and raised her head, and Orca, who was watching beside her, opened her eyes wide to gaze at the shock.

“…That was just now…”

It was the same explosion that Kanna had faced before. Thus, the flow that she recognized brushed against her skin.

Warning bells rang. Her heart seemed to scream that she had to run to Yoon Hamin right now, and at the same time, her feet kicked off the ground and dashed forward.

“Orca! Let’s hurry!!”

“Ah, got it.”

Kanna and Orca ran in the same direction.

At the end of that direction was the source of the explosion. They attempted to borrow the light of the Shield Star Alpha to somehow stop it, but an explosion occurred before that, leaving Yoon Hamin completely exposed to the explosion of unrefined magical power.

“Crrrk!”

Yoon Hamin fell from the shock.

Normally, with his ordinary skin, Yoon Hamin's sword would have swiftly pierced Reika, who had strengthened her body by consuming a totem; however, he couldn't cut through her immediately, allowing time to gain a moment.

The trace of day was disappearing. The explosion of unrefined magical power changed the surrounding air from refined magical power to unrefined magical power, and even inside the barrier, the atmosphere nearby grew ominous, creating a home ground for monsters.

A sense of foreboding arose, as if something was pressing down.

"…Huh, it's not even something I enjoy, and a day like this comes…"

A vein appeared on Reika's forehead.

Thinking it was absurd for a monster like her to be pushed back against a human, her pride was further wounded.

It seemed that Yoon Hamin was weaker before, but the strong attacks of Yoon Hamin flickered in her mind. Every time she looked at the fallen Yoon Hamin, she felt an ache in her throat.

Feeling angered, she walked towards the fallen Yoon Hamin.

Even while thinking he was probably dead, she approached, wanting to vent her rage on a corpse or anything else. The moment she stepped closer, Reika's eyes widened.

"Hoo… Hiss…"

Even in pain, Yoon Hamin was somehow rising again.

It was something that shouldn't be possible. For an ordinary person, such a thing should never happen.

"How…?"

A bell began to toll within Reika’s brain.

An ordinary person should have died in the explosion of unrefined magical power. Their body should have screamed and rotted away, leading to their d*ath.

If there was someone who could withstand the rampage of unmanageable magical power, they could only be called someone no different from herself outside the wall.

Reeling, Yoon Hamin rose, causing Reika to be taken aback. The standoff lasted only seconds, and judging it was dangerous, Reika held a totem in her hand.

The moment three totems were clenched, it became a purple sword.

Slice the enemy. Eliminate the dangerous one.

With her red eyes fixed on Yoon Hamin, the blade created from magical power quickly flew towards him, but Yoon Hamin was already standing up and reacted as if he had not lost consciousness.

Crackle. The sword that was deflected momentarily blurred. It only appeared to have a form due to the magical power, but it had no actual shape.

“Kuh…”

Yoon Hamin instinctively blocked the attack. Though Reika was overwhelmed by Yoon Hamin’s state and atmosphere, it wasn’t long before she also sublimated that into rage and gritted her teeth.

A yellow light surrounded Yoon Hamin, shining brilliantly as if to protect him. The stars sang, and the stars responded.

As starlight filled the day, the power of the Alpha Star Sirius shaped the blade like teeth. The swirling teeth glinted in readiness to bite the enemy’s neck.

The purple light was clenched in Reika’s two hands. The softly shining light in the darkness took on hues that did not establish a boundary with the darkness.

The light that could be colored with darkness or purple was grasped like a knuckle.

Even though she knew that close combat was disadvantageous when fighting Yoon Hamin, the fact that she had no monster to summon right now made Reika fight her frustration.

“Dammit…!”

With one last cry, Reika threw a punch.

In an instant, the sounds of their blows clashing reverberated.

Clang, the sound echoed repeatedly.

The moment the consecutive strikes ended, Yoon Hamin’s body staggered slightly from sheer strength and began to waver backward. He looked as though he had to press on more fervently, raising his head and lunging forward once again.

Reika’s hand absorbing the sword felt weak. Normally, she would have easily blocked such a sword, but it felt bizarre. Everything felt strange to Reika.

“How can you be stronger than before? What trickery is this? I’ve never seen someone get stronger overnight! No one besides Habar could beat me in the first place!!”

Yoon Hamin tightened his grip on the sword, showing no change in expression as he regarded Reika. The sound of the tightly wound grip echoed loudly.

“How in the world did this happen? Surviving an explosion of unrefined magical power is nonsensical!? I couldn’t take you down before because of that meddling girl… I couldn’t take you down, but…”

Reika’s thoughts came to a halt.

A girl with bright hair, like dawn, appeared in her mind.

The purple eyes that seemed to have just broken through the darkness surfaced.

“Don’t tell me…”

Reika’s eyes widened. She thought it didn’t make sense.

How could someone who wasn’t even able to use abilities withstand that? But if someone could remain standing after the explosion of unrefined magical power, it indicated that the result was already determined.

“Hahaha, hahahaha!!”

Even as Reika laughed heartily, Yoon Hamin remained serious. Breath hitching, he plunged forward. In an instant, the distance closed.

Reika, laughing maddeningly, drew magical power into her fists again. Since she wasn’t good with swordsmanship, she deemed it futile to hold onto such things, and thus, she continued the brawl from before.

Even amidst the flurry of strikes, Reika’s lips curled upward.

“Monster brat… Are you walking the same path as us because you need strength? You’ve become one of us, you know?!”

Yoon Hamin captured the enemy within his cold gaze. A gaze filled with hostility.

He had known he must avoid the explosion of unrefined magical power since witnessing it for the first time; he remembered how Kanna desperately blocked it, leading twenty people to be unconscious for three days. He had sensed that it was a must that he did not collapse to that.

The only one who could withstand the explosion might just be Kanna here.

But at that moment, witnessing someone rise after the explosion led him to question if he had grown similar to Kanna.

Why? It was not just a mystery; he felt somewhat inclined to suspect something, making it hard to dismiss it with “There’s no way.” Rather, it was quicker to understand that, indeed, things had turned out this way.

It had been possible to exert power before; perhaps it was because the magical power combined with the power of the stars was unaffected.

“Monster?”

Yoon Hamin spoke in a cold voice. His sword swung, and Reika created distance between them.

“A monster is only something like you. Not someone with this kind of power.”

Kanna also expressed her unwillingness to be treated as a monster. She understood that she couldn’t survive being called a monster and had known that long ago.

“What a pretentious act.”

Reika provocatively smiled, beckoning Yoon Hamin to respond.

Once again, he unleashed a growing onslaught.

What he thought might not have worked against Reika before now had an effect. Reika knew this well, prompting her to think of what could work on Yoon Hamin.

Ultimately, she concluded that only Habar could stop such a bulldozer-like figure and glanced at the barrier beside her.

If only that weren’t there, Habar would quickly help.

“Kuhhh!”

The sound of grinding teeth echoed. Reika twisted her waist and unleashed power towards the barrier that Orca had erected. Yoon Hamin's sword seized the opportunity and pierced Reika's side.

"I got you…!"

Yoon Hamin's heart raced at the sound signaling a collapse. He vowed to k*ll this monster the moment the wall crumbled and pushed his entire body forward.

The sword opened up Reika's side. With a scratch, her waist would appear cut as if by scissors. As bl**d began to flow profusely, Reika wobbled and sank down.

As he tightened his grip for the finishing blow, a voice sounded from behind him.

"Yoon Hamin!! To the side!!"

Kanna's urgent cry rushed towards him.

Yoon Hamin quickly turned his head. With two possible directions to consider, he recognized there was only one direction from which something could come.

Something flew from the darkness. A faint outline emerged in the light surrounding Yoon Hamin.

Habar.

The moment that name arose, a chilling feeling surged through Yoon Hamin's body.

"…Huh."

Swallowing hard, Yoon Hamin hesitated and stepped back. He decided that the thought of possibly dying before finishing off Reika was too daunting.

Habar, illuminated by a gentle light, stood before Yoon Hamin. Kanna and Orca stealthily positioned themselves behind Yoon Hamin, observing the situation.

The people without light turned their gazes towards Yoon Hamin, who was surrounded by a light that signaled the barrier's collapse.

"…Reika."

"Ugh, thank you…"

"Look at this, it's just annoying trouble."

Habar sighed.

"But if we handle this just once, all our troubles will disappear. Right now, we need your power…"

Reika pleaded desperately. Behind that statement lay a life of sleeping comfortably and carefree. A life that was easily obtained from animals that weren't too strong. Even a life that could enjoy the village while having something vaguely cooked with strange spices without needing anything special.

Recalling that life, Habar exhaled deeply once more.

"Would it be easier if we cleared what's in front of us first?"

Habar's body stood straight up. The moment his red eyes fixed on Yoon Hamin, the bodies of the three froze.

Ch. 184 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 184

Habar was right in front of him. He had thought that he should not confront him right away, but in the end, they ended up facing each other. This fact made Kanna uneasy.

She thought it was madness to fight without knowing Habar's current state, so she tried to separate them as much as possible by creating a barrier, but with walls being shattered from both sides, it was impossible to hold on.

Confrontation was unavoidable. From now on, what mattered was how to act after meeting.

Kanna pondered. She thought a lot to draw a conclusion.

She racked her brain to find clues from the fragmented conversation that just took place between Reika and Habar.

Since Habar had come to hate and despise humans, he never mentioned that they were bothersome. Instead, he often said they were a nuisance and, being aggressive, charged recklessly forward like a slaughtering chariot, leaving Reika behind; that was the original Habar.

But now, it was different. Protecting Reika first implied that he had something to gain from her.

Something to gain from Reika.

Food, a place to comfortably settle down and sleep. Because Habar had to get such things, he protects Reika. This fact soon became a glimmer of hope for Kanna.

While it might not provide a breakthrough, it didn’t feel entirely hopeless, so a small hope began to bloom.

Now, it was a matter of how to solve that breakthrough, so the tension did not dissipate.

“…I commend you for getting this far against a monster. But…”

“Habar, those bastards have the bodies of monsters. They’re still half-baked, but as time passes…”

“I got it.”

Habar was already confident in his body, so he did not listen to Reika’s warnings.

And that confidence was not arrogance, as a grinding sound echoed from the ground where she stood. A signal that he was about to charge, and Yoon Hamin, with his quick reflexes, adjusted his posture in response.

Bang. With a sound like something being shot, Yoon Hamin’s body was crashed into. Just as trucks do not carry blades, Habar’s fist seemed to deflect without leaving any scratches, unlike Reika.

Yoon Hamin, pushed back by the impact, fell on his backside, and Habar, using that momentum, jumped toward Yoon Hamin. He intended to trample him with his foot, and if he did stomp down, Yoon Hamin’s body would surely be crushed to d*ath.

Kanna, who was not unaware of this, threw herself forward.

“Kanna!!”

Orca exclaimed in shock, calling Kanna’s name.

Orca could have protected Yoon Hamin with her ability, but if that wall was also broken, Yoon Hamin would have to face even more, so she thought of blocking it with her body.

Since she was already near the collapsed barrier, she could supplement her magical power with the unrefined magical power flowing in.

It wasn’t that she had no thoughts at all.

Remembering the intense heat she once emitted, the scorching heat that melted a large monster in an instant.

“Orca!!”

Kanna shouted as she shoved Yoon Hamin away. Orca, startled when her name was called, shook off her surprise and moved her hands.

A phrase visible through the swiftly moving smartphone screen.

[Pablo: I am ready. Just give the command, and I will fire immediately.]

Upon expressing her affirmation, a sound echoed from the darkened building, resonating beyond this world. For a moment, it felt like a flash of light had entered.

Yoon Hamin rolled across the ground before being trampled by Habar.

“Ugh…”

“Kanna…!”

Kanna, her fists tightly clenched, tried to endure the pain that was causing bl**d to seep from her mouth. It was reasonable to act under the belief that if Yoon Hamin had taken it instead, he would have died.

“Look over there!!”

Something suddenly approached top of the heroes, who were running relying on Yoon Hamin’s light.

Flash.

Three illumination flares bloomed in the sky. Even one could light up the area, but they summoned wider light to ascertain the monster's position.

"The monster is trampling the student! Holster your guns and drive them away quickly!!"

"If it's impossible to defeat, just drive them away!!"

The heroes shouted thus as they each charged at Habar with their weapons.

Yoon Hamin quickly rose and swung his sword back at Habar. The starlight was obscured by the illumination, and the power he wielded was weaker than before, leaving his body feeling exceptionally frail.

"Ggah! Get your foot off Kanna…!"

Even though it was the peak of his strength, the lights were weakening him further—this was no joking matter.

Rage surged within him. As he ground his teeth, Orca's voice rang out loudly.

"Yoon Hamin!! Now!"

Orca's staff swept through the air.

Boom, the ground quaked. At the same time, the earth supporting Habar's left foot erupted upward. His right foot, which was trampling Kanna, slipped, and due to the sudden surge of his left foot, he lost his balance and fell forward.

No matter how strong Habar was, he could not resist such a sudden surprise attack.

Yoon Hamin realized once again that he was not fighting alone. He swung his sword at the falling Habar, who was toppling over Kanna.

With an upward swing from below, the sword struck Habar on the jaw.

“Ugh!”

It was the first time a m*an escaped from Habar. As he maximized his abilities and was struck in an unguarded state, the combination became an effective hit.

Leaving behind Habar, who was bleeding, one of the rushing heroes threw their weapon with speed.

Swoosh, a spear lodged into Habar’s side.

“Got him!”

“I’m on it!”

Another hero, seeing the embedded spear, charged up their electrical ability to use it like a lightning rod. The crackling blue electric current soon flowed through the spear embedded in Habar’s side.

As Kanna coughed up bl**d, Yoon Hamin dragged her away to distance her.

“Gah…!”

“Monster…”

Crackle crackle crackle!

Even as high-voltage electricity continued to assault Habar, he would not fall. Rather, he gritted his teeth and stood up.

If he killed the one who broke the lights using their light-emitting abilities, he could eliminate their sight. Thinking that taking away visibility from those relying on sight would render them helpless, he had moved, but now that the flares had fallen, that plan would not work.

The light faded, and this space sparkled like a stage. The falling light came closer and felt overwhelming.

Habar’s trembling hands grasped the spear stuck in his side and yanked it out. His glimmering eyes captured each of the approaching heroes one by one. After glancing at them in turn, he dashed toward the nearest target.

“d*mn it, Kanna… are you okay?!”

Yoon Hamin was worried about Kanna, whose back had been stomped on, to the extent she was throwing up bl**d. The bl**d gushing out stained Kanna’s chin, but she grimaced and nodded.

“I-I’m okay…”

“Kanna! Why didn’t you ask for my ability…!”

Kanna covered her mouth and suppressed the nausea in her stomach.

After just witnessing what was happening, she figured it would take time to convey the message by shaking Orca; thus, Kanna chose the fastest path.

After all, she thought she wouldn’t d*e from this, so she felt it would be fine.

“Um, could you give me a backrest…?”

“Over here…!”

Orca immediately built a wall in response to Kanna’s request. The small wall was just the right size for Kanna to lean against. Heaving, taking ragged breaths, Kanna let out one last painful cough and spat out the bl**d that had lodged in her throat.

Yoon Hamin could not say anything.

In a situation where he couldn’t guarantee what would happen if he was hit by Habar’s foot, he had survived somehow, so he had no words to speak.

Knowing that if it weren’t for this, he would have died, Kanna remained silent, concluding that she had charged in thinking she would endure in his place.

She recognized that it was not a situation where she could voice sentiments like, “Your life is more precious than mine.”

“…Thank you.”

Her lips quivered. The carefully spoken words brought a smile to Kanna’s face.

“Not at all.”

“Kanna, use my sleeve to wipe the bl**d.”

“No, I-I have my own sleeve. It’s fine. Ugh.”

Orca held out her sleeve to wipe the bl**d off Kanna’s face.

Seeing this, Yoon Hamin bitterly smiled. He remembered wanting to encounter this scene in a normal and peaceful life.

And to protect that, this time, he vowed, truly, this time, to give it his all.

The sword pointed toward the sky. The starlight became obscured by the flares.

Yet, he did not stop. If he lacked strength, he would exert it as needed. He thought that instead of battling alone, cooperating with others could also be beneficial and moved forward.

With a crack, the sound of the ground deforming echoed, and he borrowed the power of Altair to chase after the rushing Habar. As he charged like a bull, he spotted a man with dark blue hair ahead.

Asrad. Beside him, a woman adorned with blue flames stood.

“Senpai…!”

Just as Yoon Hamin saw Sel, Sel also faced him. And seeing Habar assaulting them from the side, she postponed her greeting of welcome to prepare for a joint attack.

Ch. 185 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 185

As Yoon Hamin faced Habar along with Sel, Asrad, various heroes, and Academy students, Kanna and Orca were staring at Reika, who was hidden beneath the rubble of the collapsed wall.

In the shadow that drew no gaze from others, it seemed to desperately wish that its severed side could heal back together.

“Haah, phew…”

The crimson eyes focused on Kanna, who was like a thorn in its side.

Again and again, a creature struggling from beginning to end. Although it was expected to wither away, buried in its own stress, it did not.

It gritted its teeth, wanting to somehow deal with the thorn that was blocking it at all costs.

If only this wound would heal. It was holding on to that single thought.

Next to Kanna, Orca’s gaze shifted. Her blue eyes gazed intently at the creature that seemed to be inclining down, trying to gather itself.

In that moment, Orca was convinced that while others were focused on Habar, she was the only one who could handle this monster.

However, she didn’t think that she could do it alone in this situation. No matter how much it had been cut by Yoon Hamin’s sword, a monster was still a monster; even the wound it bore might not heal anytime soon.

With her Device pulled out, Orca quickly tapped on the screen.

“Kanna, please wait here for a moment.”

After completing her request for support, she immediately stood up and left Kanna behind.

“Ugh…”

Kanna too felt her body slowly getting better. She hugged her stomach while watching Orca’s back.

Unrefined magical power flowed in through the wind entering the broken gaps. While Orca’s expression hardened, Reika and Kanna’s expressions slightly relaxed.

Realizing that the situation was deteriorating, Orca tightened her grip on her staff and swung her hand.

From top to bottom, as she drew a line, the earth below shook loudly. It spewed forth a square pillar that had caused Habar to lose his balance earlier.

“Ugh!”

The square pillar that shot up from the ground like an uppercut struck Reika squarely in the abdomen.

Orca didn’t stop and continued to gather magical power. And as if conducting, she repeatedly swung her staff.

“Ugh!”

As she gasped, at the end of her sweeping staff, Reika’s body repeatedly bounced up into the sky. Again and again she struck upward, and in the end, Orca clasped her hands together.

As Reika felt pain and dizziness from the repeated bouncing, huge stone slabs rose up on either side of her. The wall was erected with a loud thud, as

if in accordance with Orca’s gesture.

Leaving the tumbling stone slabs behind, support Orca had hastily called for rushed in.

Heroes belonging to the Lamiris family and those under it. Judging that they couldn’t interfere with the fight against Habar, they came to assist Orca and immediately moved under her command.

With her body having healed to some extent, Reika broke free from the rubble and emerged.

Kwang!

“Lady, we will handle this!”

The heroes who stood in front of Orca to protect her brandished their respective weapons and charged at Reika, who had just emerged.

For a moment, it seemed as though a web had been spun around them. Sharp threads reflecting light filled the area around Reika.

“Quickly, evacuate to a safe place!”

Heroes who rushed out in turn began to use their abilities.

The threads surrounding Reika were not meant to capture her. One hero took out a Zippo lighter from his pocket.

With a crisp sound, flames surged out, and the moment he threw it, a bright explosion ignited. The thread became a fuse.

The flames that began to blaze devoured the surroundings in just a second. Reika rushed in screaming amidst it.

The thread, having used its ability as a fuse, snapped easily under the monster’s struggle, but because it was still burning, the flames that enveloped Reika showed no signs of dying down.

“Now’s the time!”

“Uuuaaaah!”

Commands and howls intersected.

A hero wielding a long mace quickly swung it at Reika’s head. Reika felt fear, thinking this could be the end.

Just as even an elite hero would eventually tire out after fighting from evening until dawn, Reika was also wearing herself out with the continuous struggle.

Even though she had a monster’s body, she fought so intensely that she quickly became fatigued.

Sweat dripped down. The July night was heavy enough to choke on unless it rained.

“Ugh!”

She tried to kick away the mace and sever the thread coming from the side right from the start. But this time, a single cigarette b*tt flew by and exploded.

“Uaaah!”

The d*ath knell made the monster appear monstrous. The dark shadow visible through the flames began to scorch the monster’s head.

A strange smell reminiscent of grilled squid wafted through the air. But even more than that, it was an unpleasant odor. It felt like this was the smell that would arise from burning live flesh.

Reika’s eyes grew anxious.

Habar was already being dragged off to deal with the other heroes. She realized that he couldn’t protect her. Remembering that fact, Reika immediately turned her gaze away.

There were far too many people. Compared to that, she did not have enough monsters to bind them.

If it were to fight like this, Habar should have been around during the time she brought out the megalodon.

Regret streamed through her head, but now was now.

“d*mn it, d*mn it, d*mn it!”

Reika grabbed the remaining totem in her hand and scattered it. The totem that flowed out through the burnt threads exploded, pushing people back.

“Cough! Unrefined magical power! Run!!”

As people coughed and retreated, Reika turned her feet. Her hair had burned and become strangely tangled. Her clothes, charred and darkened, clung to her skin.

Her eyes were half-lidded from exhaustion, and sweat poured down like rain.

“I have to escape…”

She staggered forward. This was her maximum speed, but she had to move quickly.

With a desperate heart, she ran. She thought that once she got out of this barrier, the other humans wouldn’t be able to chase her, and although she was breathing heavily, she did not stop her feet.

Oorca, who was some distance away, did not miss that moment and pointed her staff.

“Is this… the last one?”

“…Yes.”

With Kanna’s affirmation, Orca used her ability with certainty. The ground beneath Reika’s feet sunk, and at the moment Reika stumbled, a massive wall was once again erected in front of her.

Creating a massive wall twice, Orca proved once again that she was indeed from the Lamiris family. It was a moment that showcased her power, assuring that the construction of barriers could be completed in an instant.

Having exhausted her magical power, Orca slumped down beside her.

“Hah… I’m at my limit…”

Unlike other walls, using up so much magical power to erect a gigantic wall that could block the monsters was understandably exhausting for Orca.

It made sense for Orca to be sweating and sitting down, considering she was blocking a significant hole that monsters could push through.

Kanna smiled at her.

“You did great.”

“No, still… I can’t throw myself out there like you, Kanna, so I wanted to help in some way…”

“Relying on your body like that isn’t such a big deal… It’s just that feeling of wanting to do what I can.”

Orca shook her head. But Kanna, not noticing that, stood up.

Now mostly healed, Kanna stood up unsteadily, looking at Reika. Reika, who was bent over, suddenly straightened up and looked up.

With her escape route blocked, her expression was vacant, but soon turned towards Kanna.

“What time is it now?”

“…It’s 3 o’clock.”

When Orca answered, having taken out her Device, Kanna closed her eyes tightly. It felt like time wasn’t moving at all now that it was only 3 o’clock.

Or rather, considering that it was already 3 o’clock past midnight, it might be said that they’d spent the time in a frenzy.

As Reika took the opportunity to kick out towards the wall at the moment when the unrefined magical power caused people to retreat, she poured her magical power into the groaning wall, creating cracks.

“This is almost over. Reika has grown anxious.”

“But, but Habar is also a monster, isn’t he?”

“I can’t be sure, but he may not be at a stage where he despises humanity. If we can just deal with Reika, I think things might work out.”

Kanna said that and moved forward.

“Rest for now. It’s my turn now… Only I can get close enough.”

As the heroes hesitated and couldn’t approach, Kanna crossed in front of them.

“Student! It’s dangerous! That’s unrefined magical power!”

Despite the hero’s shout, Kanna moved ahead, and the people couldn’t go to stop her.

Orca sat there dumbfounded, watching Kanna’s retreating back.

Even in the dead of night, seeing the color that seemed to say warm light would soon envelop her, she closed her eyes tightly. Then her clear eyes迎received the world again.

“Everyone, let’s wait for the moment the unrefined magical power wanes. Please believe in my friend now…”

Orca gripped her staff tightly.

Ch. 186 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 186

A human body cannot withstand unrefined magical power. This was a fact that humanity had learned multiple times. The conclusion was drawn from the realization that exploring beyond the barrier was now impossible.

While considering whether to expand the veil separately, it was clear that if it wasn’t expanded together with the barrier to block the monster, the veil could burst like a soap bubble, so it needed to be done simultaneously. Given its complexity, it was natural to hesitate.

In any case, now that unrefined magical power would scatter, it was expected that one would not be able to approach at all, and there would be no need to watch the monster break through the wall and escape, which would be a miserable occurrence.

There was a presence that could withstand unrefined magical power.

Kanna Aurora.

She was in last place. Moreover, she was someone who didn’t even know basic history. This fact had already led the academy to view Kanna Aurora unfavorably.

Regardless of other things, not knowing history like that led others to believe she was a disgusting fool seeking a clerical position with the meager ability of an Awakened One who hadn’t studied at all.

Although aspiring heroes gathered, they too distanced themselves from her, thinking, “That just isn’t right. I don’t think I can be friends with her,” and

simultaneously felt that if she became a hero, everyone would be in danger.

Of course, those at the bottom, despite working hard, desperately tried to prevent Kanna Aurora from improving her grades.

Even now, if asked for evaluations, they couldn’t say anything good.

Still, Orca knew. Looking closely, it was clear that she was a truly unfortunate child.

Wondering why she was so ignorant of history, it was nonetheless commendable that she was trying to study. Watching her learn about historical figures one should know before entering elementary school made one wonder where she had been living.

Seeing that she was capable of asking for help, Orca realized that she wasn’t entirely lacking in will. Hoping to see a better side of her, he reached out.

Studying history was one thing, but she was aware of the future.

Even knowing that she would soon be in pain, the sight of her moving forward was something Orca could hardly fathom.

Knowing what would happen in the future, if she were to advance up to the point of dying, would people really choose that option?

Even if it were the best choice, it seemed like they would hesitate.

Thus, Kanna Aurora, who threw herself without hesitation, was thought to be truly befitting of a hero as someone living in the present, not in history.

After doing all she could, Orca cheered for Kanna one last time.

Each was pleased to do what they could from their respective positions.

Kanna moved forward. With each thud of her footsteps, Reika’s nerves sharpened.

“Don’t come!!”

Reika, struggling, clenched her fists. If she could create just enough of a crack for a person to slip through the wall Orca had built, it would be her victory.

Once she escaped, people wouldn’t be able to pursue her, and she could spend years or decades sharpening the blade of revenge while bleeding here.

As Kanna began to approach, her teeth ground together.

There were already many obstacles because of Kanna, and knowing that the first mistake was her own made her angrier. It felt as if her insides turned.

Her main way of fighting was to manipulate the monsters from her command post, exhausting the opponent’s energy from a distance.

But now, she fought like a madwoman with Yoon Hamin. Originally, he was someone she could easily toy with and win against, but once she realized that wasn’t the case, her wounds had already piled up.

Just before fleeing, she had been hit several times by Orca’s pillar and was already exhausted from the cooperative attacks of other heroes.

As the flow of magical power ceased to enter, Reika had no choice but to be cornered.

While it became harder to exit compared to before, Reika slammed her fist against the wall.

Unlike the barrier created by several experts, it looked as though it would crumble easily, but it nevertheless held firm.

As Kanna drew closer, Reika anxiously stepped back.

“It feels like just yesterday you were crying like that; I guess you’ve forgotten.”

“……”

The corners of Kanna’s lips twitched.

Although she approached confidently, Kanna’s heart was tightening.

Trauma isn’t so easily erased. No matter how powerless the past incidents were, even now, being stronger requires much time to shake off those memories and cannot be erased until they are overcome.

Her stride shortened. Her speed slowed.

It wasn’t that someone was holding onto Kanna’s ankle, but the slowness stemmed from her lingering trauma.

“Since no one can come nearby anyway, just this once…”

Reika’s eyes transformed into something ominous. If it wasn’t for Yoon Hamin, maybe she could win somehow, and her hands moved.

Even though they were the same kind of monster, victory was possible.

Thinking that, Reika lunged forward. Yet, not completely foolish, she emitted a final desperate cry.

“Habar!!!”

The bizarre shout echoed loudly, causing Kanna to falter.

Having summoned the strongest being, Reika pressed forward with the momentum. She thought it would take too long to break the wall, so she left that to Habar and aimed to confront Kanna herself.

One of the totems in her hand rolled back.

Now, only one totem remained in her grasp.

Boom. The flow of magical power that blocked Kanna once more puzzled those nearby.

Kanna, tensed up, clenched her fists. She had never properly tested where her abilities began or ended, so everything felt frightening.

Even though she wanted to use her abilities, she could only exert power when exposed to unrefined magical power, so it was inevitable to hesitate now and then.

The final totem found its way into Reika’s mouth.

Gulp.

“Huh!”

Reika’s body was enhanced, and she jumped forward, soaring towards Kanna. Her feet struck Kanna’s chest like a stamp.

“Ugh!”

Kanna barely managed to block with crossed arms but could not withstand the impact and rolled to the ground.

She was pushed back heavily and immediately extended her arms to rise.

Kanna Aurora. She had no clear idea of what abilities she possessed. She thought it was an electrical ability since she could transmit electricity.

However, the ability to create a magnetic field suggested that it was likely something much more than simple electrical power.

She had previously come to after seeing a monster burned to d*ath from high heat. Electricity could produce high heat, and it had the power to burn wood without needing to be sustained for long, making it seem different.

But with no more clues, she wondered if it could be an electrical ability capable of fine control.

Even if she thought too far, the self-deprecating idea of ‘me? Someone like me?’ made her unconsciously underestimate herself as an extra.

Nothing particularly changed. No matter what she thought, it felt just that way, and she only reflected on the abilities she could use.

“Scary.”

Kanna murmured as she readied her stance. The sword at her waist was drawn. It clattered against the ground as the sheath rolled away.

“I’m scared of you, I’m trembling even now.”

Kanna attempted to cut through her trauma.

“Then, get lost! Don’t interfere!”

The once easygoing smile was nowhere to be found. That gentle yet cruel voice, indicating she could k*ll anyone in front of her at any moment, was absent.

A voice filled with desperation and struggle erupted, lacking composure.

An electric current began to flow through Kanna’s sword. The moment the barrier opened and the accumulated magical power shone bright.

A fist engulfed in a purple aura aimed swiftly at Kanna’s head. Feeling she couldn’t dodge in time, Kanna took one step back, then two, and swung her sword.

The purple lightning crackled loudly as it engulfed Reika.

Even though she already appeared singed, with the addition of lightning, her skin was damaged to an indescribable degree.

“Ugh!”

Grinding her teeth, Reika twisted her body in pain. She turned around and kicked Kanna’s sword away, while Kanna leaned back to avoid the strike.

“Habar, Habar!”

Even in fighting, a retreat route was necessary. She lamented that she couldn’t even k*ll this bothersome girl in her current exhausted state.

With such thoughts, she called out Habar’s name.

Upon hearing that voice, Habar thrashed about.

As Sel and Yoon Hamin launched a cooperative assault, Habar broke Sel’s sword. A heavy slicing sound echoed, and the severed blade fell from Habar’s hand, piercing Sel’s shoulder.

“Ugh!!”

“Sel!!”

Ignoring Asrad’s cry, a crack formed in Habar’s consciousness as he fled.

Crack, once again, the place where Habar had left cracked the ground.

Before long, the escape route Reika had desperately wished for was completed. Habar’s speed created a shockwave that easily shattered the wall Orca had built.

If an expert could break the wall, it shouldn’t be too difficult.

“Habar, just replenish the monsters and return…”

“……”

Reika said that and fled beyond the wall.

Seeing Habar, Kanna flinched.

Habar thought Kanna wasn’t that threatening and headed once more towards Sel, whom he had been able to finish off moments ago.

He believed that humans couldn’t cross beyond the barrier.

And everyone knew it was better not to go out unless necessary. If they did, very little help could be found.

It was an opportunity….

Kanna swallowed.

Reika had gone beyond the wall; Habar remained inside. They were truly isolated. Their cries for help would never reach each other.

Moreover, Reika was in a dying state and could be defeated soon. With that thought, she quickly turned her head.

Orca had a despondent expression. The gloom of not being able to finish it all the way to this point was palpable. Staring at that, Kanna quietly followed Reika out beyond the wall.

Ch. 187 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 187

The area outside the barrier was an undeveloped zone. Once, it belonged to humanity, but now even the parts that had been developed were covered in weeds and vines.

The usable buildings had become the territory of plants, transforming into the homes of monsters and mutants.

The moment Kanna stepped outside the wall to finish off Reika, what greeted her was freedom.

There was a life where the barrier could no longer be seen, even when looking up. No one shouted that she should not go outside the veil.

It was still a dark night, but the wind was blowing so strongly that it made her wonder if it had always been so windy.

The trees that gained freedom soared into the sky without knowing how high the world was. Flowers dancing in the breeze below revealed themselves, using the moon and stars as companions.

Unlike ordinary humans, those who had the body to step outside the barrier were the ones who spoke of gaining this freedom.

Nature sought to drive humanity out, but humanity struggled to overcome it again. Even the magical power that acted like a toxin evolved to somehow adapt to the waves of the body.

Over the centuries, there was natural evolution, while others had seeds deliberately implanted in their bodies, altering their constitution; some

changed their constitution by continuously receiving waves of magical power.

While someone could call it a plague from another's perspective, perhaps this was a phenomenon that had come to be because humanity wished to step outside the wall.

She couldn't be sure of the answer. There was no one to convey that message. They simply waited for someone who naturally craved the outside to emerge.

And for the first time, the humans inside the wall took a step outside, following the humans outside the barrier.

"Where did they go…?"

The moment Kanna whipped her head around, a shadow darted into the bushes with a rustling sound. She thought of looking for another path, but there couldn't possibly be a path frequently traveled by people in a place like this, so she quickly gave up.

After all, the only one interested in the barrier where humanity lived was Reika, and one Reika wouldn't open a path through the bushes.

"Tch."

Kanna jumped immediately.

In this forest thick with trees, she could easily lose sight of Reika, potentially giving her time again, so she ran determinedly to avoid that situation.

"Stop right there!"

Kanna cleared a path with the sword in her hand. In an instant, the weeds blocking her way fell away, and she charged forward.

The speed was distinctly different from Reika, who was desperately clawing through the path with her hands and body.

The summer forest was so humid that it made Kanna sweaty. Despite her breathing becoming labored, she strained to keep up with Reika.

Creak.

“Ugh!”

Reika lost her balance as she stepped on a protruding root. Just as she was about to fall forward, she quickly turned her head to look at Kanna who was pursuing her.

Outside the wall was nothing short of a home for unrefined magical power. In such a space, Reika could recover to some extent. If she wanted to, she could even create a totem right away.

As she clenched her fist tightly, a totem condensed within it and began to shine. Throwing the totem in front of her like scattering sand, purple powder covered Kanna.

Without a moment’s delay, Kanna understood that something was about to happen when Reika turned back to her and immediately predicted it, using her lightning ability to unfold her power before her.

Sending an electric current as if she was creating a magnet like before, a straight line of lightning formed in front of her.

The sound of crackling burned away all the powder that Reika had scattered.

“d*mn it, d*mn it, d*mn it! Why is it like this…!”

Reika shouted, gritting her teeth.

Kanna faced Reika while adjusting her grip on the sword she had learned from Yoon Hamin. It was still clumsy, but she could at least say she swung it towards Reika.

Kanna’s cold gaze softened her mouth. There was a slight fear of killing someone, but it was only for a moment.

If she weakened here, it was clear that all the effort and time of the people who had fought hard would be in vain.

“Surely, the first people who were driven out from the barrier felt wronged. They were discriminated against for being different. How unfair it must have felt. They were driven out as mutants without being able to protest properly.”

The cold voice made Reika’s body freeze, which had been trying to squirm.

“Of course, being born into such a legacy and having to live in a harsh environment would be unfair. Moreover, there was a better environment inside the wall, but they weren’t even allowed to enter for being different.”

The words continued softly.

“It’s natural to feel angry. You can be mad. You could have lived a better life, but because of this wall that completely separates you, you can’t. But you know it’s wrong, Reika.”

“How do you know my name…!”

Reika’s eyes widened in surprise. Kanna, who had never mentioned her name before, suddenly knowing it was frightening.

Feeling humiliated by the now bothersome Yoon Hamin, who had become stronger compared to before, being surrounded by other ordinary heroes, and ultimately being looked down upon by Kanna Aurora, whom she had belittled, was a disgrace.

“That’s not the important thing.”

“Right, that isn’t the important thing right now.”

Reika’s fists clenched tightly. And as if showing off her monstrous strength, she sprang up from her sitting position and raised her body. She approached Kanna and swung her fist.

Kanna twisted her body to avoid the rapidly swinging light hook. It wasn’t to evade like an athlete; it was to block with her sword.

Since she had a sword in hand, it became instinctive to block with it. But in this space, Reika’s body had naturally hardened.

“d*e…!”

Kanna was pushed back.

Though she had intended to fight with her sword, her opponent fought conveniently with her fists. In fact, even if she looked clumsy, it would have been better to fight with her sword if the blade was sharp enough.

However, if the blade was not sharp enough, there was no need for Kanna to disadvantage herself by fighting with a sword.

Kanna maintained her momentum, dropped the sword, and clenched her fists.

Her body had been enhanced like a mutant. The strength she had now was equal to Reika’s, so there was no way she would lose in a fight of strength.

Before she knew it, it had turned into a fistfight. Kanna’s fist struck Reika’s abdomen, and Reika’s fist hit Kanna’s head.

Unless Kanna was entirely focused on evasion or defense, it became a natural fight where hitting one meant receiving a blow in return.

“Ugh!”

“Ugh…”

Kanna, who endured being hit in the head, immediately landed another blow to Reika’s abdomen, but feeling her insides twist from the hit, Reika couldn’t hold on and hugged her belly.

Though the blade was dull, she couldn’t resist the shock dealt by fists.

Kanna seized the downed Reika and swung her fists repeatedly.

“……”

Thud, thud, thud, thud.

Kanna sat on top of Reika, silently swinging her fists. Although Kanna had never fought anyone in her life, hitting someone felt incredibly awkward, yet her punches were strong enough to knock Reika’s consciousness away.

With her teeth grit, she struck Reika hard enough that bl**d began to smear her fists.

“Cough, ugh, cough! Hah, haah.”

With broken teeth and tears streaming down her face, Reika thrashed around, desperately trying to survive. It seemed she was having difficulty breathing, releasing breath as if she would collapse any moment.

“Please, save me…”

Reika begged earnestly.

Exhausted to the bone, and with no chance to flee and recover, it was a last-ditch effort just before Kanna was about to beat her to d*ath. Kanna quietly looked at Reika.

Then she thought.

“…I, I don’t…”

Kanna had no intention of killing anyone.

But because she wanted Yoon Hamin to laugh, she knew she had to do what she had to do when facing such a situation.

What Kanna needed to do now was to incapacitate Reika and return to stop Habar. She had no desire at the moment, but if she had only been lured by Reika, she could still stop her.

Clenching her teeth, she thought.

If she killed Reika here, the root cause would vanish. But it was uncertain whether that would resolve the biggest problem.

She could give Habar what he desired. She wasn’t doing this for the sake of hating humans or to k*ll them voluntarily.

After subduing Reika, Kanna gasped for breath. Her hands were on the verge of taking a life, but she did not take it.

The night grew deeper. So deep that it seemed time was nearing for dawn to break again.

“Reika.”

“……”

“What you did took far too many lives.”

Kanna declared the answer she had contemplated during that time.

“There’s no need for atonement. People may want you dead.”

She wanted to k*ll. Everyone would likely want Reika dead. But there was a more useful purpose than killing her.

“If you stop Habar, I won’t k*ll you. But if you don’t stop him, then I will.”

Kanna tightened her grip around Reika’s neck. It was as if her fingertips had a firm hold on her very life.

Reika understood that while it was fine to k*ll all of humanity, she didn’t want to d*e herself, so she nodded. Though she looked like she was trembling, it appeared she had accepted Kanna’s offer for now.

Ch. 188 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 188

Habar was fighting with the heroes, oblivious to the passage of time. He thought that since Reika, who had almost fallen into a crisis while being surrounded by people, had gone outside the wall, she would be safe, so he focused on finishing his own task.

He swung his fists, thinking that if he killed everyone who came to stop him, then no strong ones would come in the future.

Every hero unleashed their firepower against Habar.

They had been fighting from the moment night began until dawn, but since there weren't hordes of monsters like before, fatigue was low.

Of course, there were lives that were dying, having no resistance once caught in Habar's hands, but those who managed to survive well tried to reduce their fatigue by alternating with the next hero in the fight.

As the signal flares shot up, and before they went out, Orca took out the device she had in her arms and sent a signal.

The light fell several times. Since this was not lighting that required a separate machine, Habar could not hide in the darkness and could not create darkness either.

Under the dazzling lights, people's gaze was always fixed on Habar.

They fought as if to k*ll him, and fought again.

Asrad aimed an air burst at Habar’s eyes, while threads from other heroes ignited like a fuse, trying to burn Habar, and blinding lightning and cold ice tormented his being.

Yet Habar pushed through it all. His hand then reached towards Sel, who had been spewing blue flames up close.

“Ugh…!”

Sel tried to step back in panic, but she couldn’t evade Habar’s speed.

Yoon Hamin and Asrad caught this and attempted to strike Habar’s arm. If only they could cut off that solid body, it would be great, but knowing that arm wouldn’t be severed, they settled for deflecting it.

“Ruder!”

With Asrad’s call for help, an explosion obscured Habar’s vision.

In sync with this, Yoon Hamin fired the spear of stars at Habar’s body. The power would have been great if it could pierce through Habar, but all it did was add a slight impact to his sturdy body.

Kaga kaga kakh!

Asrad’s sword made contact with Habar’s body, but couldn’t suppress its force—rather, the blade dulled where Habar’s arm had passed.

“d*mn it, if metal doesn’t work, then what…”

“I’ll do it…!”

Yoon Hamin shouted as he summoned his ability. Even if the starlight was obscured by the flares, he could still feel it weakening him.

Surrounded by the flickering lights, he tried to strike down the arm heading towards Sel. At that moment, Habar’s arm whipped around.

The hand that was aimed at Sel turned towards Yoon Hamin, who was rushing in from the right, and a startled Yoon Hamin twisted his body.

“Yoon Hamin!!”

Sel felt relief but then tension again as the target shifted from her to Yoon Hamin. Cold sweat dripped from Sel as she raised blue flames to hold off Habar.

“Gah!”

As Yoon Hamin twisted his body, Habar’s hand made contact with his left arm. Once captured, Habar’s grip was unyielding, and consequently, the prosthetic arm that replaced Yoon Hamin’s left arm was torn away.

Yoon Hamin’s body, caught at first and then dragged, tumbled across the ground.

Though the seams of his uniform’s sleeve tore apart, it wasn’t completely ripped off. However, components from the prosthetic arm flowed out from where it was meant to detach.

Rolling on the floor with his sword in hand, Yoon Hamin confirmed he couldn’t fight properly, and Habar delivered a kicking thrust towards Sel, who was rushing in from behind.

Sel swallowed hard and barely avoided the kick, feeling fear that she might have been killed had she been hit.

“Student! Quickly escape!!”

Ruder, helping Asrad, shouted. Yoon Hamin pressed his sword-hand over his left arm. bl**d flowed steadily. The forced pull had torn the flesh holding the prosthetic in place.

Grinding his teeth, Yoon Hamin tried to step back, but Habar had no intention of letting him go.

Earlier, he had deemed Yoon Hamin a nuisance and thought it wouldn’t cause him much harm to let him be, but he judged it better to k*ll him since the ability itself was becoming increasingly bothersome.

Bang!

The ground shook beneath Habar’s stomping, pulling everyone’s consciousness to one place. Simultaneously, his surprise technique prevented thought with its impressive skill.

“You, you’re the most annoying one.”

Other abilities didn’t seem to have much effect. However, the blinding light and the force that occasionally pushed Habar back was definitely strong enough to emit warnings.

With his left arm incapacitated, Yoon Hamin clenched his teeth.

Though he couldn’t move it well, he could still use his ability. This arm was just a prosthetic substituting for an arm, so it wasn’t that important.

So he took a breath to gather all his limits.

The moment Habar’s fist flew towards him, Yoon Hamin shouted once more.

“Sirius!!”

Looking up at the sky from this place, he invoked the name of the star that shone the brightest. He aimed to draw out his power to its maximum.

The black metal began to tremble. The prosthetic, rendered unusable, rattled while the black metal soon reacted to Yoon Hamin’s power, heating up intensely.

Heat surged, and the blackness turned into a white glow that radiated warmth. It felt as if it would burst at any moment. The sword held in Yoon Hamin’s right hand reacted similarly.

A simple slash, but enhanced with ability.

Though he had just one hand, the lack of strength would be compensated by his ability.

Kaga kaga kakh. It was the moment when everything he thought wouldn’t work against Habar was disproved. The sword plunged into Habar’s arm, and that heat began to fortify the severed edge.

Habar, with his arm severed, looked at his right arm in shock.

Thud. The severed arm fell, cut off just below the elbow, becoming a light of hope for the other heroes watching. Yoon Hamin’s ability had become a beam of hope on this dark night.

“You…”

After all, his arm could heal. Therefore, he thought it wasn’t a big deal. But someone who could cut him again and again was undoubtedly Yoon Hamin.

If that were the case, Yoon Hamin must be eliminated. Habar thought that to himself.

“Gah…”

Yoon Hamin groaned. He had managed to create space while Habar momentarily dazed, but he could no longer fight.

Due to forcibly raising his ability too high, the prosthetic began to melt away. The liquid metal dripped down, falling and clattering on the floor.

In a rush, Yoon Hamin took off his blazer and gripped his sword again, but the sword was on the verge of losing its shape. Fortunately, it was reputed to be a fine sword, so it managed to hold itself together, but it seemed to scream that this was the limit.

Realizing this fact, Yoon Hamin sighed, and taking advantage of that moment, Habar closed the distance.

“d*mn it…!”

Many heroes rushed in, but no one could stop Habar. They gathered, having seen the beam of hope, but just like the star unreachable by hand, Yoon Hamin could not inflict wounds on Habar’s body.

Habar’s foot kicked Yoon Hamin in the solar plexus. The attack, infused with speed and power, knocked the breath out of Yoon Hamin.

Clutching his chest with his last remaining right arm, Yoon Hamin let out a silent scream.

Unable to breathe, his head grew increasingly blank. It felt as though no matter how hard he struck his chest with his fist, breath would not come.

“Stop!!”

The heroes who had missed Habar rushed in again. Simultaneously, the hero hiding on the rooftop aimed at Habar’s head and began firing bullets.

Habar staggered after being shot in the temple, but could not be stopped.

Habar resolutely walked towards Yoon Hamin. Looking at him curled up on the ground, he lifted his foot.

To crush Yoon Hamin’s head, to end his breath.

“Ka, …na.”

Just when Yoon Hamin’s breath was on the verge of escaping, a desperate voice issued from his mouth.

I don’t want to d*e. There’s still so much I want to do. I don’t want this to end.

Desperately wishing, Yoon Hamin reached for the sword rolling beside him.

Habar realized this and kicked away the sword, causing Yoon Hamin to lash out in vain.

“Ah…”

“Goodbye.”

In that moment, as her foot was about to crush Yoon Hamin’s head, a voice echoed.

“Stop!”

It was Kanna’s shout.

Grabbing the hair of Reika, whom she had dragged along, Kanna lifted her to reveal the battered face, panting heavily as she glared at Habar.

After beating Reika nearly to the point of breathlessness, she had brought her here, exhausted and unable to resist.

Had she been any later, perhaps she would have tried to jab Habar once more, irreversible consequences would have awaited her. Realizing this, Kanna swallowed hard.

“Haah, haah…”

Habar’s gaze turned to Kanna. It briefly skimmed over the holder of the hair.

“What?”

Since Reika had escaped outside the wall, Habar thought it would be safe, so he was both perplexed and astonished that she had been dragged back inside.

Habar stopped just before crushing Yoon Hamin’s head and stepped back down to the ground.

Kanna confirmed that her strategy was working and shouted even louder.

“If you make any funny moves, I’ll snap her neck!!”

As Kanna raised her hand, Reika’s body trembled and lifted into the air.

Between Reika’s swollen eyes, barely exhaling colorful breaths, Habar peeked through at her.

Ch. 189 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 189

Kanna originally thought that Reika would stop Habar on her own.

But upon reconsideration, doubts inevitably arose as to whether it would really be as easy as it sounded. Thus, Kanna concluded that, in order to get revenge for what had happened before, she should create a bl**d pudding and use it to threaten Habar.

If she killed him, there would be no turning back. She had no plans to give up the reins against Habar.

That was why Kanna was threatening him while pushing Reika, who was barely breathing.

The current Habar did not k*ll out of hatred for humans; he believed he had to k*ll them to get what he wanted.

Kanna’s thoughts were not greatly different from reality.

Habar stood blankly, gazing intently at Kanna and the Reika she held.

The reason Habar acted this way was that the price Reika mentioned was too sweet to pass up.

Once this was over, he thought he could sleep on a soft bed, neither as hard as the floor nor folded up like a hammock.

He imagined spending comfortable days in a pleasant space rather than in a suffocating thicket. The idea of being cool in the summer and warm in the winter felt like a dream.

Since he was still breathing in this sweaty space, everything Reika had said felt like the stuff of dreams—unrealized, leaving him with nothing to remember, a contradictory tale.

Such dreamlike stories were things that could not be realized without Reika.

Reika was the one who brought it up and said that as long as she followed her words, it could come true, but if Reika was in such a state and would d*e soon, then everything would surely become futile.

Habar clenched his mouth shut at that realization.

No matter how fast he was, it would take time to leap, and anyone who could pull Reika from outside the barrier would surely k*ll her before that, so he had no choice but to stay still.

Kanna assessed Habar’s state and, seizing the moment, began to approach, using Reika as a shield.

“You have other wishes, right? If you don’t want to see this guy d*e, then quietly go outside the barrier. And don’t come back.”

As she got closer, she maintained a somewhat ambiguous distance, just enough to deter Habar from launching a surprise attack. Habar found Kanna’s seemingly approaching but somewhat aloof demeanor amusing, causing her to chuckle softly.

“…Is this a threat?”

“That’s right, it’s a threat.”

All eyes were gathered on them.

It seemed that the monster, who appeared unresponsive to anything, stopped at the sight of a hostage. Therefore, the others swallowed their breaths, cautious not to disrupt the atmosphere.

They stood still, alternating their gazes between Kanna and Habar.

Though there was a stir at the sight of a monster turned into bl**d pudding and with hair being grabbed, it wasn't loud. Silently, it stirred great waves of feelings in their hearts.

Kanna was intensely nervous. Amid so many gazes, she had to hope this threat would work.

She had to ensure Yoon Hamin would not d*e.

"Back off, more, more!"

"……."

Habar glared at Kanna as he stepped back. Yoon Hamin, clutching his chest on the ground, began to catch his breath and control his body.

"You can't get what you want by fighting like this… But if you promise not to come back, I might consider it a little."

Killing Habar was already a tall order. It was clear that Habar would be the one standing up repeatedly, waiting for the other to d*e.

Thus, the only way to stop Habar was to make him leave on his own.

"What will you consider? No, in the first place…"

Habar's gaze shifted left and right. It felt as if he was probing the surroundings.

Despite her small stature, the pressure she exuded was no joke, and those who caught her gaze took a step back.

"Someone has already gone outside the barrier. Starting with you."

"…What do you mean by that?"

Kanna was taken aback by the sudden change of topic, raising her tension levels. She kept reminding herself not to show surprise no matter what was said.

Whether this was a solvable problem remained to be seen.

“Is it true that you’re being kicked out, as Reika said? You can go outside the barrier now.”

At those words, the heroes’ gazes shifted toward Kanna. Kanna felt her stomach churn under the pressure of their scrutiny.

As she swallowed and remained silent, Yoon Hamin wobbled to his feet.

“Of course, that’s not the case.”

Kanna felt relieved at Yoon Hamin’s voice, even without saying a word. Despite everyone potentially hating her or trying to drive her away without acknowledgment, the fact that Yoon Hamin was there made her think it was okay.

Upon hearing Yoon Hamin’s response, Habar lazily opened his eyes.

His gaze seemed bored, as if anything was fine. Yet beyond that boredom was a sense of annoyance directed toward Kanna.

If this continued, Kanna would become an even more troublesome person, and he was certain it would affect his life.

“Really? Then it’s even more dangerous.”

Habar calculated.

“…I have already killed many people. If the ones living outside the wall are treated like people, what does that make us? Then am I the criminal you talk about… is that what I’ve become?”

Habar murmured, but no one answered his question.

“Are you coming to hold me accountable? After driving us out like Reika said, if we now live outside the wall, will we have nowhere to go?”

The cold voice that fell quietly froze everyone.

No matter how everything seemed annoying to Habar, he knew when he needed to act. Realizing that if things continued like this, his space might disappear, he felt he couldn’t retreat.

“What I wish for…”

Not to sleep on a bed as hard as the floor nor have to curl up like on a hammock.

To spend a day in a soft bed, in a cool space in summer, and a warm space in winter.

To catch weak animals effortlessly and enjoy various tastes with special spices.

He had many wishes, but in reality, he could not achieve them.

Ultimately, he had to make compromises. What he truly wished for if he simply gave up and went out.

“It’s you not coming out.”

Originally, he intended to take over inside. Following Reika’s plan would have been the right thing to do. But if Reika died here, then that plan would be over.

Since Habar did not directly inherit Reika’s thoughts, he had not considered acting alone.

“…In the end, I couldn’t achieve what I wanted.”

A killing intent rose from Habar. The realization that his efforts went unrewarded quickly turned into rage.

He had wishes, but in this situation, having to give those up and seek something else felt like an unwelcome sacrifice.

That killing intent was directed not at Kanna, but at Reika, held in Kanna’s hands.

Though it was an emotional flow understandable even to ordinary people, conversely, it was an intense emotion that was difficult for ordinary people to follow.

He could be irritated, but it didn’t directly translate into killing intent.

However, for Habar, who had lived as a monster, this was possible. Aside from the annoyance, there was no one to question his thoughts.

Habar’s bare feet pressed against the ground as he moved forward. Yoon Hamin staggered, blocking Kanna’s path.

“Don’t come any closer.”

Kanna stiffened as she extended Reika.

“Are you going to k*ll her?”

Habar, now more relaxed than before, sighed in resignation. At the same time, the corners of his lips turned up. Giving up made him feel lighter, leading to the first thought of indifference.

“Go ahead, I was already planning to k*ll her.”

Startled by Habar’s calmness, Kanna judged that Reika was no longer of value as a hostage and let go of her.

“If you k*ll her, then while I’m alive, no humans will come out.”

Kanna dropped Reika to the ground and dodged. Upon realizing Kanna was removing herself from the danger, Yoon Hamin dashed towards the fallen sword.

Just as Kanna rolled on the ground, Habar’s foot extended to where Kanna’s head had been moments before.

Only the debris where Habar had been standing remained on the ground.

“!!”

Kanna instinctively evaded and placed her hand on the ground. Using her hand as a pivot, she quickly turned her body, and Habar's remaining foot swept at her.

With her supporting body lifted off the ground, even the mighty Habar could not avoid falling.

Without having learned any acrobatics, Habar collapsed, and Kanna seized the opportunity to throw herself at him.

Though surprised by Habar's decision to let go of his greed and choose another path, Kanna quickly made her judgment to try to overpower Habar.

"Kanna!"

In the meantime, Yoon Hamin, who had picked up the sword, rushed at them, clutching the now-blackened blade, having lost its heat.

Kanna sat atop Habar, and Yoon Hamin once again summoned his ability to stab Habar in the neck.

Seeing that, Habar deflected the sword's trajectory with his severed arm and rolled backward, pushing Kanna away along with Yoon Hamin.

"Gah!"

Though Yoon Hamin had only one arm, he desperately fought not to pin Kanna down.

In that instant when the two rolled, it became Habar's turn, and his fist clenched. However, before he could throw it, the other heroes rushed in.

"Stop him!"

Habar clicked his tongue.

Everything felt annoying, and he saw them as bothersome beings.

Ch. 190 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 190

Many heroes rushed toward Habar.

Though they tried to be cautious, fearing that an explosion of Unrefined Magical Power might occur as it had when dealing with Reika, ultimately, the only weapons capable of attacking an opponent who was difficult to catch with a g*n were swords and spears, leaving them no choice but to approach.

Habar found everything bothersome.

Things he didn't want to do, things that required him to move his body were all annoying tasks. However, it was clear that if he just stood still here, bothersome things would continue to happen in the future.

His gaze was fixed on one person.

No matter how desperately the other heroes rushed in, they could not catch Habar's attention. He simply moved his body with the thought of "Let's just k*ll one. Just that one."

Sel's blue flames attempted to engulf Habar, but he merely perceived the flames as slightly warm and pushed through. Sel fell with a light flick of his hand.

Asrad also teamed up with Ruder to launch a surprise attack, but they too ended up collapsing on the ground.

They took down the heroes in a different manner. The hero who tried to restrain Habar with a rope failed in the struggle and ended up rolling on the

floor, while the hero who tried to suppress Habar found himself subdued instead.

The heroes who lay on the ground with broken limbs let out cries of pain. No matter how skilled they were, pain didn’t disappear.

“Stop right there.”

Habar advanced. Excluding the bothersome heroes, he walked heavily toward Kanna. Ten, twenty, thirty. The number of people collapsing increased, and their destination was the place where Kanna Aurora was.

Unlike before, Habar did not intend to k*ll all these people.

Under normal circumstances, he would have killed them, and that method would have been far easier. But the plan that Reika spoke of had all but gone to waste, and he had to return to living outside the barrier.

However, if these people held onto their anger from their deaths and started to emerge outside the barrier, wouldn’t they pose a threat to him? This calculation led him to spare their lives.

Even though it was bothersome, the thought of wanting to avoid troublesome matters in the future influenced his judgment.

Kanna felt a wave of tension seeing Habar like that.

He was getting closer. The 50-meter distance had become a range that could not protect Kanna any longer.

Reika rolled on the floor, and Yoon Hamin was standing diagonally to Kanna’s right, holding a sword. It seemed he was determined to use all his abilities to block Habar if necessary.

Kanna looked at Yoon Hamin, whose left arm had melted away. She trembled. The worry that Yoon Hamin, having lost an arm, would be in danger if he tried to do anything made her shiver.

Kanna cast a glance at Reika. The Reika rolling on the floor had no value as a hostage. Trying to lure Habar with sweet words had turned into an impossible situation, making her feel pity for Reika, who had been abandoned by Habar.

She had been beaten to the brink of d*ath on purpose to bring Habar here.

Kanna felt a slight sense of regret, but she decided to retreat for the time being.

As Habar was calculating, Kanna's mind was racing rapidly in the midst of the situation.

The people who had attacked Habar had fallen, but they were not dead. No one looked like they were about to d*e or were bleeding profusely.

If that were the case, then Habar might not be thinking of killing anyone right now. Was it because he found it troublesome to have humanity come to hold him accountable the moment they stepped outside the barrier?

Blocking humanity from going beyond the barrier was, in fact, an impossible task. It could be possible that another existence like Kanna could emerge from somewhere.

Kanna was an artificial being created by Reika, but both Reika and Habar had undoubtedly been born from nature and evolved, so that possibility could not be ruled out.

Even so, wasn't it humanity that had denounced and alienated such beings as monsters all this time? Habar's decision to exclude Kanna in order to buy time set him into motion.

Kanna was aware of this fact and stepped back.

Anyone would surely be afraid if the strongest human, who could not be stopped by humanity, targeted them.

"…Hamin."

Kanna hesitated and stepped back. Yet she didn’t forget to grab Hamin’s collar and gently pull him.

Yoon Hamin took a step back in silence, following Kanna’s lead.

Kanna thought she could not confront Habar with her abilities, and she saw Yoon Hamin, who had lost an arm, as even less capable of confronting him, so she kept an eye on their escape route.

Even if they tried to escape, the heroes that would protect them would not d*e. Even if one of them broke a bone.

That calculation served as the foundation for Kanna’s actions now.

“Let’s run…!”

At the same time Kanna yanked on Yoon Hamin’s collar, she released it as if sliding away. If he was going to jump, he should do it quickly, so as not to hinder her.

“W-What?!”

When Kanna abruptly turned and fled, Yoon Hamin was surprised and followed closely behind. However, as he did so, he had no choice but to keep in check Habar, who could pursue them at any moment.

“Kanna! Are you alright?!”

“Not exactly…!”

Kanna and Yoon Hamin ran desperately toward the barrier. As they sprinted at quite a fast speed, Habar’s gaze turned toward their backs, and he began to charge at them swiftly.

The heroes wondered if those two could be the key to victory and desperately rallied the remaining forces.

There were quite a few heroes in various areas. Thus, before they could find an effective means to stop Habar, it was feasible for enough heroes to fall

and provide impediment.

“Catch them! Those students might manage to come up with some clever idea…!”

Among the students in academy uniforms, numerous powers converged.

The water ability formed a massive cube to try to trap Habar. As Habar thrashed in the watery prison, the ice ability swept past him.

With a cracking sound, Habar was confined in a gigantic ice cube. It seemed to have bought them a moment, but Habar broke out of the ice using sheer force.

Heroes nearby, who needed to use close-range abilities to be effective, rolled on the floor with broken bones and bl**d, yet they clung to life.

“Gah, gah…”

The weary hero’s eyes were directed at Habar.

That was a being they could not stop. The thought that such monsters still existed beyond the barrier filled them with dread. They awaited rescue at the hospital.

Leaving all those heroes behind, Habar turned to chase after Kanna.

And within that pursuit, there was Reika.

“…Ugh…”

Having been beaten almost to d*ath by Kanna, her stamina was depleted. Breathing was difficult, and her struggling sounds were barely audible.

Habar moved forward toward Kanna but stopped and stood still at Reika’s location.

What would happen if he let Reika live like this? Wouldn’t his peaceful life be threatened? If he continued to knock on humanity’s barrier, would

humanity someday accept monsters as humans and would he have to be controlled under an unwanted affiliation because of that?

He couldn’t let humanity be disturbed any further. Undoubtedly, troublesome events would occur.

While he could manage alone, he felt that the effort and time he needed to pour into it were too precious to waste.

“Hey, Reika.”

It was a moment when all the heroes were concentrated, but Habar paid no mind and continued to speak.

“Is there a surface that’s not hard where you can stretch out and sleep?”

He knew that if he could not achieve it, they had to compromise from another side. Yet, something in him seemed to be attached as he posed the question to Reika.

“Is there a place where you could be cool in the summer and warm in the winter?”

It was a story like a dream.

Indeed, it was unrealistic to tell someone to give up on their dreams.

He wondered if such things would be possible outside the barrier once he returned.

Could one remain cool without going into a valley or river? Could one be warm without needing to layer on clothes?

For Habar, it was a tale like a dream that he could not even begin to imagine. However, things that could be called dreams often approached more sweetly when they were tantalizingly out of reach.

Things with no possibility at all didn’t catch one’s attention, nor did they resonate.

“……”

Reika’s eyes trembled. Her swollen face looked pitiful, but there was no one around to feel pity for her at that moment.

Habar’s cold gaze, which looked down on her, gave Reika a chilling sensation. Although her instincts urged her to flee immediately, she felt an inexplicable remorse for being unable to do so.

“Hey, Reika, talk to me. You brought me here, so why are you like this? Are you trying to shift everything onto me when you’re not even prepared?”

Habar’s red eyes glimmered as though they were piercing through Reika.

“It seems like you lack the power to fulfill my dreams. It’s actually dangerous. If this continues, our kind could all be in danger. So, d*e at the hands of the humans you so wanted to torment.”

With that, Habar turned to pursue Kanna.

He shrugged off the idea of killing Reika with his own hands as if it were a bother.

The outstretched hand of Reika, unable to say anything, lingered in the air.

“……Ah.”

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Yoon Hamin ran after Kanna.

Had Kanna run that fast before? The answer quickly came that it was because he was unable to run quickly while trying to balance himself with one arm missing.

He realized once again how inconvenient it was to be missing an arm.

Moreover, with the sword in his right hand, the weight was further tilted, making his posture awkward. Balancing while running was proving to be quite difficult.

Still, he did his best to keep up. He also looked back to check if Habar was following him.

He was concerned about Habar stopping to look at Reika, but Kanna ran without checking. Yoon Hamin felt anxious, thinking that Kanna must have her reasons.

He began to worry about whether it was right to let Habar come into contact without dealing with Reika.

“Kanna, how far are we going?!”

“…Huff, huff, to the barrier… beyond that…”

Since Yoon Hamin hadn’t properly assessed what had happened to his body, he couldn’t pinpoint exactly. But he had his suspicions.

That Yoon Hamin had gathered enough power to overwhelm Reika. And that he had managed to sever an arm against Habar. That was a realm that even the original Yoon Hamin couldn’t reach.

Unlike the Yoon Hamin who had to gaze at the path of destruction without being able to touch a single fingertip, the current Yoon Hamin had the strength to cut Habar’s forearm.

It could be credited to the sword that Orca had given him, but fundamentally, it was because Yoon Hamin’s abilities were strong that it was possible.

Based on those reasons, he drew conclusions, which fit the current situation. Yoon Hamin also kept silent, recalling the story he heard while fighting Reika.

Normally, he might have stopped, saying he couldn’t go further, but he might have said that they couldn’t go together, so he had to stay here. But at this moment, Yoon Hamin felt his heart race at the fact that he could cross the wall with Kanna.

Was he looking forward to stepping into a new world, an unknown space? Or was his heart overflowing with excitement at the thought of seeing the same world as Kanna?

Regardless, he was satisfied as long as he could run together.

The crumbled wall was two-fold. One was the original barrier, and the other was the wall created by Orca. That, too, crumbled, soon revealing a massive fracture that awaited them.

If they exited this space, unrefined magical power harmful to humans would be waiting for them. But conversely, freedom welcomed them.

They escaped from the routine of waking with the wall’s spit of dawn and sleeping with the wall’s swallowing of dusk, greeted by a world that started and ended at the horizon.

Kanna and Yoon Hamin quickly fled. Habar, who had abandoned Reika, chased after Kanna again.

Boom!

With a tremendous noise, Habar moved. The other heroes could no longer stop Habar. It was impossible to face Habar with an ordinary human body.

If she truly engaged, it was only natural that no one could win.

Yoon Hamin quickly turned back at the sound, and Habar, in a brief time, closed the distance. Yoon Hamin felt his breath hitch. It seemed to remind him of when Habar had struck him in the solar plexus.

Still, Habar was missing an arm. Above the elbow was still intact, but the only hand capable of forming a fist was her left hand.

If that was the case, Yoon Hamin, with only one hand remaining, could still react somehow.

“Kugh…!”

The moment Habar’s left fist collided with the sword, a resonating sound echoed in his hand. Yoon Hamin, trembling, bit down hard to maintain his grip on the sword.

Using the slight backward push on his left side, Habar aimed to kick him around the head.

However, this method was one he had used before, so Yoon Hamin also defended with his foot.

It may not have been a good choice to clash with Habar from below the knee to above the ankle, as he felt a crack in his bones. He even lost in the strength contest and was pushed back.

With Habar, who had no right hand, and Yoon Hamin, who had no left arm, they coordinated around Kanna.

“Yoon Hamin!!”

“Go quickly! I’ll hold her off!”

“……Thank you.”

Kanna looked at Yoon Hamin and then dashed back the way she came. She would soon be heading towards the barrier. Habar, glancing at this, tried to chase after her.

No matter what happened, he couldn’t let go if there was even a 1% possibility of entering the barrier again.

Yoon Hamin stood in the way.

“We still have much to discuss, don’t we?”

Yoon Hamin felt the sword heat up again. Dawn seemed to be near, yet it still stood at the boundary of night and dawn, on a stage where the stars had not yet set.

As the flare expired and went out, the stars shone brightly as if determined to fulfill their roles until dawn broke.

He glanced at those stars and gripped his sword tightly.

The aura of unrefined magical power started to swirl around, trying to heal Habar’s body. Likewise, Yoon Hamin’s left arm was trying to resemble Kanna’s constitution.

But it would still take time for the lost body to reappear. In that time, the two aimed to settle the matter.

“I have nothing to say. It’s bothersome. There’s nothing to talk about with you.”

“…What if I’m a human who can leave this barrier?”

“……”

Habar’s eyes, which had been cold as she was about to rush toward Kanna, turned sharp. There was no need to ask if it was real.

If there was a possibility, she would just k*ll.

With a snap, her left hand moved.

That signaled the start of battle, and Yoon Hamin called to the stars.

“—Polaris.”

The North Star.

Its brightness wasn’t particularly high. In terms of light intensity, Sirius was among the brightest. But considering he couldn’t rely on that power for long, he had no choice but to borrow other forces.

A compass that everyone relied on the night sky.

The star that glowed brightly wished for all the people of the world to see this light and follow it.

He marked a point. It pierced the air yet was not meaningless.

Habar twisted her body, repeating punches and kicks. While she hadn’t learned it from anyone, she seemed to instinctively know how to use that strong power more efficiently.

Whirling around, she unleashed attacks on Yoon Hamin.

Seizing the opportunity, Yoon Hamin thrust his sword with determination. The pain he felt surprised Habar more than before. Though the sword, made of metal, seemed to be turning white, it didn’t appear to melt away just yet.

The ambiguous yet bothersome strength pricked at Habar’s nerves.

“Pathetic thing—”

If she couldn’t unleash the same power as before, she wished for d*ath right there. Humans should not exit the barrier any further, as doing so might threaten her safety and peace in the future; she attempted to eliminate that possibility.

Habar twisted her waist and swung her fist using that force.

Yoon Hamin saw it and jumped away to create distance.

Habar’s fist swung through the air, but she still tried to close the gap. If Yoon Hamin were to intercept from afar, that would become another troublesome matter, so she wasn’t about to give him the chance.

“?”

But Habar’s body twitched. The point she had marked in the air began to sparkle. Threads binding to her body, chains ensnared her.

Even knowing this wouldn’t work, the heroes stepped forward once again to buy another second.

Yoon Hamin’s ability. Polaris wasn’t a power used for tremendous strength. Of course, strength could be exerted, but the main ability wasn’t there.

Like people searching for their way using that one star as a compass, it aimed to give direction, helping them know where to go in the wandering darkness.

The point Yoon Hamin marked could connect to other stars, but it had meaning because of that one star, leading the power.

Habar struggled to sever all the strings tied to her. The heroes holding onto Habar lost in their tug-of-war, tumbling down.

For a brief moment, Yoon Hamin aimed his sword at the temporarily immobilized Habar.

Crack. A resonating sound erupted. Yoon Hamin could only be astonished as Habar blocked with her remaining elbow, the healing process being too slow to replace the lost hand.

“Step back!”

The voice towards Yoon Hamin. And the heroes simultaneously let go of the strings. That line became a conduit for electricity, and Habar stepped forward, groaning from the numbing pain.

All of their strength converged. Everyone’s hopes and desires came together in one place.

Let’s drive out this monster, take back our happiness and peace.

The focal point of this was Yoon Hamin, and the heroes and academy students all followed behind him.

Strength compounded on strength.

All their power surged toward Habar, and while she gritted her teeth to hold her ground, Yoon Hamin finished preparing his attack.

“—Sirius.”

Yoon Hamin’s sword turned bright white.

Before the dawn broke, before the night ended, the star shone brightly once more.

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The sky seemed to be gradually brightening.

The stars had not yet deserted, lending strength to Yoon Hamin. Even as dawn broke, the stars would merely be obscured, not vanish entirely. But at this moment, while the stars shimmered, they would become a greater source of power for Yoon Hamin.

The sword held by Yoon Hamin turned a pristine white.

The sword, capable of storing and releasing magical power, struggled to accept that force, transforming from black to pure white. Yoon Hamin’s golden eyes focused on the target, having absorbed his ability to the maximum.

He had to defeat the enemy as quickly as possible before the sword melted under the high heat.

While he could exert power through ability alone, the assurance of the sword being able to inflict damage gave it an irresistible direction.

The sharp blade was aimed at Habar’s heart, who was standing still.

Even if people misused their abilities, they would be drawn together, binding Habar’s feet, while Yoon Hamin would deliver the finishing blow.

It was a truly ideal fight, culminating with Yoon Hamin’s sword piercing Habar’s heart.

bl**d gushed from Habar’s mouth. Yoon Hamin, wondering if the embedded sword might stop the bleeding, mercilessly pulled it out, and Habar collapsed to his knees.

“Ugh…”

The bl**d gushing out formed a small puddle.

Meanwhile, the sword Yoon Hamin held seemed to become lighter, until it lost its shape and fell to the ground, dripping into a glowing liquid in front of Habar.

Those watching were enveloped in silence.

Is this really the end? Or is it not quite over yet? With no one shouting victory, only tension lingered in the air.

Yoon Hamin realized this and moved to shout victory. He clenched his fist, drawing strength as he knew he had to deliver the finishing blow.

Just as he was about to strike Habar’s body, Habar crashed to the ground.

As his knees straightened, he sprang up like a spring, spinning in mid-air. Yoon Hamin’s eyes widened.

To move like that after being pierced through the heart seemed absurd to him, leaving him bewildered.

Ignoring Yoon Hamin’s feelings, Habar desperately ran outside, overflowing with unrefined magical power.

The day was gradually brightening, erasing traces of the North Star. While the power of the stars could be borrowed, maintaining their characteristics was a reality.

Because of this, the heroes’ abilities were not aimed accurately. Though gunshots rang out, it was physically challenging to hit the swiftly moving Habar.

“Stop right there…!”

He wanted to scream in disbelief that someone could survive after being stabbed in the heart.

He felt it was absurd that such a monster existed, questioning how such a creature possessed both strength and intellect.

This was not only Yoon Hamin’s sentiment, but everyone’s.

Victory? Still? Their hearts grew heavier with doubt.

“……”

Kanna ran somewhere. It wasn’t far. Just to where the Barrier had been.

Between the gaps in the collapsed barrier, there was space for a person to stand. The walls felt thick enough to be a tunnel, but with the collapse, there was no ceiling. Shadows were absent.

Kanna came here to lure Habar out. There was no other reason.

Habar had anticipated that something troublesome would occur in his future and had lured Kanna, the only human capable of exiting the wall, to this spot.

If he were to negotiate one last time like this, Habar would exit through the wall while humanity could simply rebuild it.

Kanna gazed intently. She watched Habar, wounded by Yoon Hamin’s obstruction and bound by the attacks of other heroes, coming towards her.

Though her heart was pierced, she could not help but feel awe at his approach. She couldn’t help but be astonished.

Fear crept in as well. It felt profoundly unfair how the world could create such a monster, leading her to reflect on the injustices of existence.

Habar grew increasingly close to the wall, and her heart began to heal. Coughing up bl**d, Habar ran towards where Kanna was.

He headed for Kanna, who stood guard between the gaps in the wall.

“…Cough!”

Had Kanna not been there, he might have simply escaped over the wall. But with Kanna blocking the way, he could no longer proceed.

Habar, wanting to exert force, understood he had to stabilize himself and gazed at Kanna instead.

Though not exhausted, his aching, pained eyes scanned Kanna’s body.

Kanna quietly looked at Habar.

She waited for his breathing to stabilize.

“…Habar.”

Habar was surprised to see Kanna know his name, but he wasn’t relaxed enough to respond.

“I think I understand what you fear.”

“I fear nothing…”

“Yeah. You’re that strong.”

Habar shot a fierce glare at Kanna, wondering if she was mocking him. However, Kanna continued without minding his pressure.

As if to assert that she wouldn’t be intimidated by Habar’s gaze.

“Your ancestors must have been unjustly exiled. I know that monsters are often falsely accused.”

Kanna placed her hand over her heart.

The heroes who had been quietly listening nearby stirred. The information contradicted everything they had been taught and was hard to accept.

They had been brainwashed to believe they were victims, and this was the opposite of what they had been taught.

Habar wasn't particularly interested in the tale.

"So…?"

Habar, clutching his chest, pondered how to pierce Kanna. Realizing that killing someone would only bring adverse effects, the plan to target Kanna first was already abandoned.

Recognizing that increasing his kills would only reflect poorly on him, he was filled with thoughts of incapacitating Kanna instead.

Despite knowing Habar's intentions, Kanna continued speaking.

"In such dire circumstances, you must have had desires. So you followed the words of someone like that and even came here to k*ll people, right?"

Now was the time to unearth the past that humanity had turned a blind eye to.

As monsters were driven away, humanity claimed to be 'justice' and labeled themselves 'heroes' who chased away monsters.

Though they were already dead, their records continued. It was the right time to expose the true face of those who buried the truth and concealed it in books.

"The school inside the barrier continually educated you to see yourselves as monsters, causing you to be called monsters despite having no guilt from beginning to end. It's only natural to be angered when you've chased them away and then been called monsters."

Kanna's gaze swept around.

It was a statement from Kanna, who had been closer to monsters than anyone else. Accepting this fact was difficult for anyone who didn't know it.

"But you know that channeling that anger in this way won't change anything. In fact, this behavior only proves you're the monsters. If you wanted to change perceptions, then you shouldn't have done such things. If you wanted to live as humans more than anyone…"

Habar, angered by Kanna's words, frantically shouted, his voice loud enough for all to hear.

"Stop it! Changing perceptions…? Wanting to live as a human? That thing just hated you all! And so did I! I didn't particularly want to live as a human! How can you talk as if you know everything when you don't understand anything? It's disgusting, disgusting…"

"Really? Then what did you come here for?"

Kanna's violet eyes stared at Habar.

Dawn was breaking. Light flowed in from beyond the wall, gradually washing away the night. The increasingly bright world was tinged slightly with violet, beginning its transition to the hue of the sky.

It was the moment the sun revealed itself, as if soothing the cold world.

Habar flinched. His body felt a warning that he could not move here. He stood rigid, trembling only at his fingertips like a weak animal before a predator.

"Ugh…"

Experiencing a sensation of breathlessness, Habar looked up at the figure before him with trembling eyes.

The dawn enveloped her. The brightening dawn bloomed. In a place visible to all, between the inside and outside of the wall.

Kanna stood in a place where everyone could see, creating a space for negotiation.

“I am, I am…”

Habar tightened his fist.

“I just needed a place to feel comfortable. I hate sleeping on a hard, cold floor, and sleeping in a hammock makes me curl up…”

Kanna fell silent upon hearing those words.

“I came here because they said I could be cool in the summer and warm in the winter. We don’t know about that kind of life. They said it existed.”

The sweet words that Reika whispered to manipulate Habar flowed out. Kanna heard those words and spoke up.

“…You wanted to live as a human more than anyone.”

Wasn’t it Habar who dreamed of life within the barrier more than anyone else?

With this thought, Kanna lowered the corners of her lips.

He had killed people, and that was certainly unforgivable. It was impossible for Kanna to forgive in his stead.

However, Habar was a monster, an entity that could not be killed. Even if confined, if he wished to emerge from a cage, he would. If he wished to k*ll, it would surely result in numerous casualties.

Thus, resolving it through human laws was impractical. Humanity had to compromise.

She wouldn’t touch him; Habar promised he wouldn’t touch humanity in return.

Kanna chose to end this with a promise, even realizing she had the power to burn Habar alive.

“Habar.”

So that this chain of despair could be broken.

“If you want to live as a human, don’t run away from your responsibilities. That is precisely what monsters do.”

Habar looked up at the rising sun upon hearing those words.

He faced the dawn breaking brightly, without discrimination, on both sides of the wall.

Ch. 193 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 193

Habar stood blankly in front of Kanna.

“I don’t want to live as a human. How can I take responsibility from the beginning? I’m a monster because I did something I can’t take responsibility for. I have nothing to say even if I’m called a monster. I just want to run away.”

He bit his lip.

“Move aside. I want to leave. I just want to sleep now…”

It was summer, and it was too hot and humid. Despite that, they had been fighting all night, so no matter how strong Habar was, feeling increasingly sleepy was unavoidable.

It wasn’t a burden on his strong physique, but he didn’t want to give up the desire to sleep at the moment he wanted to.

Kanna blocked Habar and continued speaking.

“No matter how you try to confine me, Habar, nothing can truly contain you. Even if I tell you to sit quietly as atonement, well… Furthermore, considering the number of people you’ve killed, we have too many things to bear on our side to even think about a d*ath penalty, so I can’t tell you to take responsibility that way either.”

She knew that making such a statement would be ineffective.

Engaging in this meaningless discourse was simply because she hoped the heroes around them would listen. It was akin to asking, “This is how I think; what do you all think?”

“So if you confine me, just stay still, and if you try to k*ll me, just d*e quietly…?”

“If you want to go somewhere anyway, you’ll struggle, and if you want to live, you’ll fight again.”

Kanna didn’t fully place the responsibility on the other person.

Please confine me. Please d*e. She knew that there was no way the other person would be convinced and quietly comply with that. How many would refrain from resisting when they have power?

The reason Kanna didn’t intervene was simple.

She wanted to give Habar, who had lived as a monster, a chance to receive education as a human and to live as someone who could take responsibility for his actions. That was all.

“…You can live as you wish. But there’s always a cost associated with that.”

Habar raised his head. He was surprised because the words were similar to what Reika had said but somehow different.

You can achieve the dreams you have. But you must pay a price for them. The sentiment was similar, but mentioning responsibility felt strange.

“What kind of responsibility?”

There was a hint of interest in the question. It was unbearably hot at that moment.

For her, who had lived as a monster, this notion was closer than the guilt of having killed someone, and since it was an unavoidable situation, Kanna just let it pass.

“If you want to sleep in a bed, you need to earn money to buy a bed. If, as Habar said, you need an air conditioner, you have to buy that, and then pay the electricity bill too…”

“The bed is hard. It’s made of wood.”

“What are you talking about? No one thinks that.”

As Kanna said this, Habar’s gaze briefly shifted to where there were other people.

“…But there’s no way I could have money. Besides, even if I try to live as a human, how can I be a human after killing so many people?”

“That’s right. You’re a monster right now.”

“…….”

Kanna emphasized the point of being a monster. Habar remained quiet, accustomed to it, but he felt an unease somewhere deep inside. It was uncomfortable how quickly he was reminded of being a monster after just expressing his desire to live as a human.

Kanna didn’t fully grasp that sentiment, but she spoke softly enough that others wouldn’t hear.

“You don’t have to take responsibility in the same way as humans do. You’re strong, right?”

She conveyed that it was a type of responsibility that wasn’t avoiding accountability but also wasn’t what Habar was trying to evade, leading to a vague feeling of responsibility.

Since she was such a strong being, she would live as she wished anyway, but if Habar were to live in his desired way, it was only natural to follow the rules here.

Before they knew it, Habar's right hand had emerged. The girl who had been tightly clenching her hands turned to look back. And, appearing anxious, she looked at Kanna again.

"You're probably going to hate me for this, but is it possible…? Even if I don't k*ll all humans, can I live like that?"

"In fact, if you k*ll all humans, then you won't be able to live like that."

"……."

Habar slumped his shoulders at Kanna's response. He felt deeply that he had been deceived by Reika's sweet words into making foolish decisions.

Kanna approached the discouraged Habar and placed a hand on his shoulder. Startled, Habar looked up, and Kanna stepped back a foot into the wall.

"To the heroes, and to my seniors and peers who are enrolled in the same academy as I am."

As she opened her mouth, attention turned to her. Even those far away who couldn't hear were receiving news through contacts or by reading messages.

"There are those who have fallen fighting this monster. They are comrades we fought alongside, friends, and family, and I am keenly aware of that."

Every word Kanna spoke captured their attention.

Some were insisting that he should be killed right away, questioning why they were having a conversation instead of fighting, thinking that a conversation was unnecessary at that moment.

But Kanna didn't share that opinion.

She couldn't say things like, "You couldn't learn this because you didn't know, so just d*e for your actions." If she wasn't an inherently evil being

that derived joy from killing people, wouldn’t it be fine to give them a chance just once?

“I know you want to ask about responsibility. There may be those who think it’s fine to execute without going to court because he’s not one of us.”

Most of the heroes agreed with that sentiment. They had fought all night for that reason, so who would expect different results at this point?

However, it was still something that required capability.

“I understand it’s hard, but killing him requires many sacrifices. Furthermore, if we sacrifice and k*ll him, other monsters may come seeking revenge.”

At that statement, the surroundings began to murmur.

“He committed unforgivable acts, but it could also be painful to overlook it just because he’s a monster. Yet if we gave him one opportunity to take responsibility, I believe he wouldn’t bring more victims in the future.”

As Kanna spoke, a voice mixed with irritation rose from one side.

“What responsibility does a monster have?! To begin with, we’re the ones who are scared! What good does it do to promise that they won’t attack again? Do you even know how many people have died because of the ones who’ve already attacked?!”

The atmosphere quickly changed. While Kanna seemed to be gaining control over the surroundings, there were always those with opposing views, and it was natural that those views had sufficient grounds and validity.

“We must cut down the roots of fear. Only then can our families rest easy!”

“That’s true. We have risked our lives to fight for peace. Rather, I’m curious about why a student would give a monster time to recover.”

People were pressing Kanna, and Yoon Hamin felt uneasy about the situation.

But Kanna responded calmly, different from Yoon Hamin’s concerns.

“How can we just cut them away? Do we have to wait until the heroes d*e, or that hero over there dies, or that we, including the students, must d*e before we can negotiate? Where is the need for us to be the weaker ones when our power is already depleting…?”

Kanna pointed at Habar standing beside her.

“If the people to protect are reduced, who will prepare for the unexpected attacks that could come at any moment?”

Everyone fell silent. They wanted to eliminate the seeds of anxiety, but the fear of the consequences leading to their own deaths, or their comrades dying, and weakening the defenses to put their families at risk was something they did not wish for.

That said, there were still counterarguments.

“Then let’s say we negotiate as the student suggested. We might be able to live right now. But if that monster suddenly changes its mind and wreaks havoc like this again, who will take responsibility for that? Can you take responsibility, student? By that time, it would already be too late.”

Kanna bit her lip.

She wanted to say that she could take responsibility. She wanted to say that if they were to k*ll him at that moment, it was indeed possible because she held the reins now. But she was afraid that speaking up would lead to her being cursed, asking if she was siding with the monster and calling for his d*ath.

“That’s…”

“Don’t confuse the person who will take responsibility.”

Just as Kanna was mumbling and searching for words, a single voice broke in.

It was a voice that Kanna, Yoon Hamin, and Orca knew.

Heads turned, and at the forefront stood a woman with turquoise hair.

Although she was standing as a teacher and not as a hero, now that the battle was over, she had the right to be present.

As the homeroom teacher of the academy students who participated in this battle.

“What do you think you’re trying to do by imposing some responsibility on the children? To the student who offered alternatives to save everyone? There are children who have homes they need to return to, families waiting for them at home, and friends at school. Are you planning to drive those children into danger just to feel proud?”

Lucia looked around as if she couldn’t believe what she was hearing.

Her gaze landed on the hero who had spoken about responsibility.

“Who will take responsibility? Then let me ask you this. If killing the monster at the negotiation table brings reassurance, who will take responsibility for having to fight again amidst bloodshed? Will you take responsibility? By that time, you might already be a corpse.”

The cold, crimson gaze was sufficient to silence that hero.

“…You might be a corpse by then.”

In an instant, Lucia had dominated the atmosphere and turned her head sharply.

Silence returned to be on Kanna’s side.

Kanna opened her mouth once more, intending to persuade those listening to her.

—Thank you, teacher.

Kanna silently expressed her deep gratitude.

Ch. 194 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 194

I had to discuss what to do about Habar.

If we had to k*ll him, we would have to fight against Habar, who would resist desperately, and that was not a good story for humanity either.

If we were to k*ll Habar to eliminate the monster and regain a brief peace, could we truly ignore the sacrifices that would come with it?

Kanna presented the next question: if a vengeful monster were to come next, who would stop it then?

Humanity had to pay countless sacrifices even to defeat one monster. And yet, even after that, the current situation almost ended with them missing and getting pushed back.

Kanna brought Habar here to share a negotiation plan.

Monster Habar would prevent the monsters outside the barrier from damaging it. Furthermore, any future attacks would be regarded as Habar's responsibility.

Of course, if Habar were to start a fight after receiving what he wanted by saying, "What of it?" then there would clearly be no one to hold him accountable.

But there was nothing to do but believe. Blaming anyone here was utterly meaningless.

Since the number of heroes had decreased and, as a result, the gaps created couldn’t be filled by students from the Academy, if that became the starting point for humanity’s destruction, who would take responsibility for that?

Even if a person were designated as responsible, it was clear they would perish.

Thus, people ultimately had no choice but to accept it. While anger could gather in one place, it could only be expressed within the limits of ability.

“There’s still a lot to resolve.”

Kanna looked up blankly. There were still many unresolved matters. It wasn’t just the issue with the monsters, but delving into the history entangled with the monsters revealed overflowing confusion.

For the past two centuries, as humanity conducted its affairs, it was easy to say to stop closing their eyes and lying to themselves, proclaiming they were right and had never acted wrongly, yet it would be hard to put that into action.

As she grew older and lived her life here, it was hard to believe that all the hardened perceptions were wrong and needed to be revised.

So, solving the problem was now the task ahead. It felt frustrating to have only just resolved one thing.

Kanna blankly looked at Habar, who stood beside her in a daze. Habar stared blankly at the people, unsure if it was okay for him to be like this.

Most of the gazes directed at him were filled with hatred and anger, yet the fact that there was someone looking at him without such emotions made him hesitate even more.

If the person who could k*ll him could feel that instinctively, it became even more unavoidable.

“Would just an air conditioner and a bed be enough? But the air conditioner might still be a stretch. There aren’t even power lines outside the barrier.”

As Kanna said this, Habar tilted his head.

“Air, con?”

Being trapped in limited knowledge, he recognized the word “bed,” but not “air conditioner,” leading to his confusion.

“Air conditioner. The thing you mentioned. If that’s all there is, then you won’t k*ll people in the future, right? It’s a condition that if there are monsters that touch the barrier, you will stop them so that others can feel safe.”

“…If you grant my wish, I’d be happy…”

He was not particularly interested in human cries and screams. All he wished for was to spend days rolling around on the bed cool in summer and warm in winter.

As Habar stood timidly next to Kanna, she smiled wryly.

“That’s a relief.”

“Everything isn’t over yet.”

Kanna acted as if everything had ended just because she had maybe convinced Habar. If she had successfully persuaded him, peace would have come to the world, and many people, including Yoon Hamin, could live within this barrier. Kanna smiled at that thought.

However, Yoon Hamin had no intention of accepting that outright.

Kanna was even taken aback by Yoon Hamin’s sudden surge of enthusiasm. It occurred to her that perhaps the reason she hadn’t finished off Reika was the cause, prompting her to shift her gaze.

“Why? Is it because of Reika?”

She turned her head sharply, but Kanna couldn’t see Reika’s figure. Other heroes had dragged her away, leaving Kanna with no means to catch sight

of her.

Yoon Hamin stepped closer to Kanna, who was searching for the unseen Reika with her eyes.

“…No, it’s because of you.”

“Me, me?”

Kanna looked at Yoon Hamin with an expression that seemed to ask what she had done wrong. Yoon Hamin found Kanna’s reaction frustrating. It felt like she was trying to gloss over everything that had happened, as if simply smiling now would fix everything.

Leaving behind the dazed Kanna, Yoon Hamin gritted his teeth.

Acting as if he believed all the fighting was over, Yoon Hamin continued his own battle. The fact that he had never truly protected Kanna left a mark in his heart.

While he couldn’t heal that wound, if it could become a scar that reminded him, allowing him to remember and not forget, perhaps the next time he would be able to protect Kanna as he wished.

“I can’t forget what the association did to Kanna.”

“…Ah.”

Of course, he still hadn’t obtained any evidence. Without evidence, he couldn’t persuade others who had nothing to do with the situation. So, he couldn’t rush into anything, but Yoon Hamin was determined not to stop fighting in the future.

“Just talking won’t solve the problems, so I can’t resolve them immediately, but if I gain more strength, I promise I will truly solve everything then.”

To resolve the matter regarding Kanna, evidence was necessary. To obtain evidence, he needed to discuss matters with the association in the near

future.

Grinding his teeth in front of others, Yoon Hamin grew tired and sank into Kanna’s embrace.

Kanna gently hugged Yoon Hamin and provided support. To keep him from falling.

“…Are you two dating?”

Seeing this scene from the side, Habar carefully spoke to Kanna. Hearing that voice, Kanna smiled wryly at Habar.

“Yes, we are dating.”

Habar nodded at Kanna’s reply. He didn’t really want to know the details, and it was burdensome anyway.

Dawn broke. The sun rose, illuminating both the inside and outside of the barrier equally, burning fiercely.

Amidst the increasingly conclusive atmosphere, Lucia cautiously approached Kanna.

“…Kanna.”

“Ah, Teacher, thank you so much for earlier. If it weren’t for you, I would have had a hard time.”

“No, I didn’t do anything. I just sent the students off, and I only watched from afar, worried…”

Lucia gazed at Kanna, fumbling with her words.

She had so many things she wanted to say, but the thought of putting it into words made her feel shy, stopping her from speaking. Unaware of this, Kanna tilted her head and looked at Lucia.

“Typically, the academy has a short break, but this time there will be a long break as an exception. When the school resumes next time, could you come back to school…? I’m sure Kanna would become a great hero.”

“…If I’ve done this much, wouldn’t I already be called a hero?”

The one who responded to Lucia’s words was Orca, who was trudging up from the back.

“Orca…!”

“Hello. I was resting because I was tired.”

As Orca shrugged, Kanna stared at her intently. She wanted to run over immediately, but since Yoon Hamin was in her arms, she couldn’t.

“O, Orca… Thank you so much. Making the wall that large must have been a task.”

She had poured her magical power to the extent of single-handedly blocking the crumbling barrier, making her admiration for Orca all the more evident.

At Kanna’s compliment, Orca seemed flustered and rubbed her neck.

“Well, since everyone was fighting desperately, if I didn’t do my best, I wouldn’t have been able to hold my head high, you know?”

When Orca said that, Lucia couldn’t help but smile through her emotions.

Yoon Hamin, Orca, and Kanna, the sight of the three gathered together filled her view.

“Indeed. Everyone is already a wonderful hero.”

The response to Orca’s words was affirmative. She hoped they would all come out to the academy again for the ‘hero’ profession, but those who stood here and fought for their lives were deserving of being called heroes, not just by title.

In the future, those who would wake up here would be able to sleep without worry.

Seeing Lucia’s tearful expression, Kanna couldn’t help but chuckle.

However, she struggled to answer Lucia’s suggestion easily. Having grown close to Yoon Hamin and having worked well with Orca to overcome the crises approaching the world, she pondered what more was needed.

Was it okay to go to the academy and live each day diligently as a hero?

Kanna was seriously contemplating this within herself.

Ch. 195 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 195

The investigation finished, Habar was with me. Since there was no need to rotate the cameras that had been set up diligently, I was able to turn on the air conditioner again, and Habar was enjoying the cool breeze beside me.

Yoon Hamin’s house. Habar, sitting on the sofa, blankly stared at the machine blowing out air.

“It’s hot outside, but it’s cool here.”

She had been amazed by how cool it was inside the building when we went for the investigation, but now she was even more surprised that it was possible in her house as well.

It was a matter of providing Habar with the bed and air conditioner he wanted, but it wasn’t as simple as just giving them to him, so it inevitably took time.

Seated on the leather sofa, Habar leaned back.

“It’s not hard, and I can lie down alone… So this is called a sofa?”

His hands groping as he carefully examined the sofa was a stark contrast to the frightening gaze I had seen before. Who would believe that Habar, who displayed such innocence, was once a monster that instilled fear in everyone?

Of course, if one saw his solidified form with black hair and red eyes, they might still tremble.

“Right, it’s a sofa.”

“You’re saying I can take this with me?”

“No, not this one; a new one. But if you’re going to stay outside, you’ll need to find a sealed space.”

“…A sealed space?”

“If the cold air leaks out, the only cool place will be right in front of the air conditioner, and everything else will get hot.”

Upon hearing that, Habar made a face that suggested he was having trouble.

“…There aren’t such spaces.”

They usually resided in abandoned buildings. When food ran low nearby, they moved, and if there was no abandoned building, it was natural to camp in the grass, so I wondered if it was suddenly feasible to create a space where we could use an air conditioner.

What should I do about this?

“Ah, is there anyone among your friends who can build walls? Just seal off wherever you go and use the space inside.”

Suddenly, Orca came to mind. If someone could build walls like Orca, sealing off all sides and finally covering the ceiling would meet all conditions. Of course, we’d also need to make a door.

“I don’t know. I didn’t ask because it seemed bothersome.”

“I think we should go back and ask. Otherwise, the air conditioner will end up being useless.”

“…It’s hotter outside.”

“Still, just go visit.”

“Okay…”

Habar said that and leaned back.

“?”

“I’ll leave in a bit. It’s too hot right now.”

“Whatever, do as you like.”

Habar eventually went outside only after the sun had set. Given that it was midsummer, I could understand why he wouldn’t want to go out while the sun was up.

Yoon Hamin, who had dropped Habar off, came back after showering and shook his hair.

“…I’m tired.”

As I thought everything was finished, I felt strange. Yoon Hamin sat beside me and stared at me intently. The slight growth in the arm suggested he was soon to have a body resembling that of a monster.

I narrowed my eyes at a vague difference that seemed noticeable and not noticeable at the same time. Just because he kept staring wouldn’t make him suddenly grow.

“Are you okay?”

Yoon Hamin managed to endure the explosion of unrefined magical power released by the monster. But it seemed that his body had not reached the point where it could heal on its own.

It was said that to protect the world, Yoon Hamin had to get closer to monsters, but that was no joking matter.

“A little.”

“…By the way, the teacher said he wants me to come back to the academy. I guess it’s okay for me to go now.”

He casually twirled his long hair around his fingers. The hair dancing between his fingers seemed to dry out, yet it also didn’t.

Even though I said that to Hamin, I wasn’t really tempted to go back yet, so I subtly gauged Hamin’s reaction.

Having rested this long and suddenly going back to the academy felt a bit awkward. Yet, suggesting not to go after screaming in a school uniform might raise suspicions, which seemed troublesome.

What should I do?

The goal had been achieved. Despite my grades not being great and my lack of confidence, I had endured and ultimately reached what I aimed to accomplish.

I didn’t particularly want to become a hero.

People might not believe it, but as expected by Habar, humanity was gradually stepping outside of the walls, and once it was concluded that monsters were no longer a threat, the profession of hero would become unnecessary.

So, I wasn’t particularly desperate. Perhaps things would be different if I thought of it as a stable job paying quickly like a civil servant.

“What about Kanna?”

“…The academy is also taking a break, so I’ll have to think about it during that time. I did tell the teacher I was thinking about it, but I still plan to decide as quickly as possible.”

This wasn’t a matter to decide hastily. Since I was contemplating how to shape my future, I had to make a careful decision.

“Really? I’m planning to go.”

Yoon Hamin naturally moved closer to me. As I subtly moved away, Hamin's gaze followed me, as if insisting I shouldn't drift too far.

"Being a hero seems nice."

"…Actually, I don't know right now. To resolve everything you've been through, we'll need to gather evidence. Wouldn't it be too late to enter honorably as a member of the association?"

I fell silent. Hearing his voice promising to take revenge in my place made me feel unexpectedly happy, and I twitched the corners of my lips.

"Would it be better to bring up history and overturn the association itself? If I had known this would happen, I should have secretly discussed it with Habar to stir up the association."

"Are you planning to use Habar now?"

"Well, he had been quite docile when he was with Kanna… I thought maybe it would work if Kanna asked nicely."

It was a statement I could make because he was just Yoon Hamin, not hero Yoon Hamin. He wouldn't voice opinions like using monsters for personal revenge; he was now someone who had completely changed.

And Habar, rather than getting caught up in grand and lengthy affairs like the annihilation of humanity, cherished living comfortably day by day, receiving a bed and a single air conditioner to survive the summer and winter.

I hoped he recognized that. No one would take on such bothersome tasks just because I asked.

"Forget it. Let's postpone things that can't be resolved right now. More importantly, I've melted that prosthetic arm I spent money on. What should I do about the debt?"

"…That's another issue that's hard to resolve right now. Should we

postpone it?”

“Isn’t there a risk of becoming a delinquent? What about the sword from Orca’s grandfather?”

As I shifted the topic toward Yoon Hamin’s left arm and prosthetic arm, he sharply attempted to change subjects.

“I think you’ll probably have to work at Orca’s house for a lifetime.”

“Well, if I become a hero, they might overlook that since I’ll be considered high-quality manpower.”

“Well… it seems the value that it belonged to your grandfather is more important than any material gain.”

“Ugh, I don’t know. I’m scared to contact Orca.”

“I’ll convey it properly.”

I subtly lifted the device I had been afraid to turn on for a long time. As I waved it gently, Hamin grabbed his throbbing head and sighed.

“It’s a headache.”

I chuckled and set the device down. I pulled my legs up onto the sofa and hugged them closely. Curling up, I leaned my head back.

“…Hamin.”

“Yeah?”

“I’m feeling lost now.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Just various things.”

Hamin tilted his head, as if he didn’t understand my words. In fact, it was natural I couldn’t articulate what this feeling was, so it made sense that I couldn’t convey it properly.

Muttering under my breath, I sighed.

What kind of world would unfold ahead? With no such monsters appearing in the future, what kind of story would continue? The world I wished for had come close, and I had reached a point that felt like an end.

I lived in this world but was also a spectator of it.

It felt like I had stopped at a place where it would be right to write “End.”

I suddenly wondered if I was now unnecessary. Of course, knowing Hamin would be sad stopped me from finishing that thought, yet I couldn’t help but question whether it was right for me to be at the end of such a story.

“…How should I live from now on?”

The time spent crying out in anguish quickly passed but left scars that tormented my heart.

I faced the landscape I had longed for, but upon closer inspection, it was a bit different from what I had envisioned.

Standing before results that seemed to say life doesn’t go as planned, I felt a sense of satisfaction.

Having seen the final story, I felt I had reached satisfaction but still held a vague notion of what more I should do next.

Muttering like this, Yoon Hamin pulled me into an embrace with his one remaining arm.

As he drew me to him like a friend, Hamin whispered softly.

“How to live? You should live here with me for a long, long time.”

“For a lifetime?”

“For a lifetime.”

Hamin confidently claimed that and then, inhaled sharply.

“Um, but Kanna might not want to live with me for a lifetime… She’s still young, and I might have rushed things.”

Realizing what he had just said, he floundered, trying to rectify it somehow. I saw him and chuckled, lifting my head slightly.

“Do you want to move? It might feel cramped to live here for a lifetime.”

“…Where to?”

“Outside.”

I whispered to the gaping Yoon Hamin.

“If you bring the ring then, I’ll think about it.”

Ch. 196 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 196

The rainy season had passed, and it seemed that summer was also receding. Autumn, which would cool down the heat, had yet to arrive, but the decreasing warmth made me think that it might be gradually approaching.

I gladly accepted the invitation to return to the academy.

It was difficult to correct the misinformation that had spread across the world, and I understood that it would be hard to achieve what I wanted by causing trouble against an organization that had already been established as an association and built trust with many people.

I needed to gather evidence and also rise to a position where people could trust me. If there was no evidence and I couldn't sway the hearts of those who knew nothing, it would be a lonely and unfavorable fight.

Thus, I hoped earnestly.

I would expose this rotten internal situation.

"…By the way, Kanna, you've been quite active lately."

"Uh, um… I thought I could heal my arm this way…"

There was a being that would always perk up in the morning due to physiological phenomena. When I was tired, this didn't happen often, but as I began to rest well, this being started to gradually show its presence.

On such a morning, Kanna was riding on top of me.

In fact, it wasn’t entirely news to me. The arm was already almost fully formed.

The fact that I had become like a monster was strangely acceptable, especially when I thought of it as being like Kanna.

Moreover, I couldn’t express how happy I was that Kanna had taken the initiative to approach me in order to heal my arm.

Kanna, having wiped the sweat from her forehead, lay down beside me. The left hand, which seemed to have been created quite some time ago, twitched slightly. As the time to return to the academy approached, it appeared that Kanna was also thinking a lot about her own worries.

However, I felt a little awkward about showing my left prosthetic arm melting in front of others, and I wondered what kind of reaction would come from showing them that my left arm was fine the next time we met.

That must have been a worry for Kanna as well.

“Hmm.”

I gently hugged Kanna, who was lying languidly next to me. I brushed her soft hair and quietly looked at her. Unlike before, I thought there wouldn’t be an overload of abilities, so I gently touched her.

Could it be that after this incident, I might be able to handle my abilities a little better?

“Thank you, Kanna.”

“Uh-huh.”

Despite her soft m*an, Kanna leaned closer to me as I pulled her in. She closed her eyes as if wrapped in warmth, like a blanket.

In truth, even if Kanna had seen something and possessed a future that only she knew, it didn’t feel particularly real since I hadn’t experienced it myself.

However, every time Kanna tried to achieve something and it came true, her words seemed to take on a realistic shape.

Following that, I had been uncertain, but now I was confident.

If Kanna hadn’t been there, I would have accomplished nothing.

If I had been able to live normally from the beginning, would it have been different, had I not been excluded by other peers and fallen into depression?

I wasn’t sure. Yet, I couldn’t think of anything else but how fortunate I was that Kanna took care to keep her heart unchanged and boldly acted on it.

While I didn’t necessarily think I had to protect others, feeling a sense of pride in doing so filled my heart with emotion.

Making a body similar to a monster like Reika did not come easily. Still, it wasn’t entirely impossible. Hamin’s body was able to endure unrefined magical power because he had built up resistance to it.

With that in mind, I thought that if I made it slightly denser, I might not even need to create another arm, and I worked hard on that.

As a result, after climbing on top of Hamin every morning, his left arm had formed and even a hand had appeared, allowing him to move it. I worried about what would happen if an arm that couldn’t move had been created, but seeing Hamin move that hand gave me peace of mind.

Now, he would be able to live a normal life. I firmly believed that.

I was grateful to Hamin for creating a place for me, an outsider, and I wanted to do anything for him. I wasn’t sure how to express that feeling right now, but one thing was certain: my wish to see him smile had not changed.

Making that wish come true was simple yet difficult, so I had to pay attention to it.

I wanted to see you smile. That’s why I was able to try my best.

I wanted to see you smile, so I stay by your side.

What would happen to me if Hamin had not wished for it and if someone other than me was by his side? Would I have quietly closed my eyes?

Would I have become a being that came as an outsider and left as an outsider?

That thought brought a sense of fear. Ultimately, it felt like I was just drifting, observing, and returning.

Fortunately, it hadn’t ended that way, and I was relieved. I glanced at Hamin. Then, I carefully approached and placed my hand on his back.

“…What’s wrong?”

“I scratched it with my nails yesterday, and it’s fine now.”

The wound that had formed on his shoulder blade had healed by now. Just like Habar, it was proof that he had become the same kind of being as me. Although it had already been confirmed with the arm growing out, I wished for other evidence as well.

“Then I’m a monster now… isn’t that right?”

Hamin looked at me with a bitter smile.

“But I don’t really feel that much has changed.”

Hamin waved his arms, trying to see if there was anything strange or different. But since I had never felt such things, why would Hamin feel them?

No, could it be that Hamin could feel those things? Still, since he hadn’t found anything, it seemed that he didn’t feel otherwise yet.

“It’s just a feeling that we could live outside the barrier.”

“Then going outside might be a little scary.”

He tilted his head as if to question, and Hamin shrugged.

Sure enough, there could be dangers lurking outside, just as he said. After all, it was an area where monsters lived, making it an inherently risky environment.

Still, if we could go outside, if we could live outside, would there be a need for us to be in a place like this?

“Honestly, I feel like I’d be awkward living here now. Maybe we could go far away?”

“…But if we go too far, we’d have to live like complete savages.”

There wouldn’t be any civilization left, and living like a monster, spending a day in abandoned buildings or as a homeless person was certainly concerning.

When I sighed in agreement, Hamin whispered.

“Then maybe we should persuade them to set up a few things outside? Like connecting wires outside the barrier. Something like that.”

“If that works, it could be nice.”

I blankly raised my head. Gazing into the air felt strange. The prospect of living in a world without anyone looking at me, escaping this place was somewhat exciting.

If we connected the wires, Habar’s air conditioner would certainly be usable all day.

It utilized a method of generating electricity through solar energy and storing it, meaning if it continued to be cloudy for days like during the rainy season, it would gradually deplete and become unusable, but wouldn’t it be great if we could prevent that?

“Do you think Habar would help us if I went to him and asked him to do a few things while moving?”

“I guess you’ll have to ask him when you go.”

At my question, Hamin sighed. He often acted like he couldn’t be bothered to stop by home and rarely left, and sometimes he wouldn’t return at all if he found it bothersome.

How could I persuade a being that seemed to embody the essence of laziness? It seemed like I was pondering that.

I couldn’t help but smile at him as I stepped back.

“Then should we at least go see?”

Although the barrier had been rebuilt, this time we had uniquely constructed a door together. A single door connecting the outside and inside of the barrier. It was a door for Habar to come in and take things, but it surely meant that we could go out as well.

“Let’s do that.”

Hamin nodded at my suggestion and got up. The hot weather had made me reluctant to go outside, but today felt like a good day to go out at least once.

Leaving this house, stepping out into the city that felt incredibly awkward and dismal, and escaping the barriers that had surrounded us, there would surely be a wonderful forest waiting for us.

As I had seen before, I went outside to take in that scenery.

Holding Hamin’s hand.

Ch. 197 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 197

In fact, even if one were to say it was outside, there wasn’t really any spectacular scenery. It was just a forest filled with larger-than-expected trees; there was no grand new world depicted beyond the Barrier.

In contrast, the scenery that was untouched by human hands was painfully bleak.

Even in a forest or a mountain, ultimately a path would be formed where people walked, but it was difficult to find such a path in a place like this, making entering feel like a suffocating task.

Still, I took significance in having stepped outside the Barrier and glanced around.

I joked about walking around the Barrier, but it was so vast that the only option was to walk a little and come back, aside from the immense sea where maritime monsters or beings wouldn’t overflow.

Yet, it seemed like it was a good experience, as Yoon Hamin continued to look puzzled, tilting his head since his return.

“…What are you thinking about so deeply?”

“No, I was just wondering if I could become a Hero living outside the Barrier after graduating from the Academy.”

“Why? Would a Hero be needed outside the Barrier?”

There weren’t really many people going out besides me and Hamin, making such grand talk sound hard to accept.

However, Yoon Hamin seemed to have his thoughts organized firmly.

“Isn’t it the case that there are limited monsters among the beings that hunt monsters? There might be incredibly strong monsters. Plus, someday even people inside the walls might have the traits to become mutants who can step outside.”

After returning home, Yoon Hamin recalled the landscape outside the Barrier. His gaze painted a picture of a lush world that once belonged to humans but was now returned to nature.

Of course, once humans return, they’ll cut down and develop the land, but seeing it as an unknown space where people hadn’t ventured seemed to fill him with excitement.

“I need to study hard. I have to become a Hero capable of establishing an agency.”

As I said this with a chuckle, Yoon Hamin scratched his head.

“Well, being the top student is not too far off…”

The reason he couldn’t confidently say it himself was that he hadn’t been the top student in every exam.

If he were at least swapping places with the second top student, he might think there was a lot of talent this time. However, since Yoon Hamin had outright thrown away exams, he found himself in a slightly precarious situation.

Moreover, how long had it been since he had last attended class?

“Not long?”

“Hmm? Why?”

When I threw out the question, Hamin looked puzzled as well.

Why was he suddenly being suspicious? Or was he genuinely clueless? But I thought it’s possible he could have forgotten, having lived so busy.

In the end, I would have to kindly inform him.

“If we keep skipping class, we’ll both fail the notes, right? Let’s take the last place together.”

As I grinned and looked at Hamin, he was startled and turned away, seemingly to check the calendar on the shelf under the TV. It was a big blow that he hadn’t attended class for nearly a month.

Given that, Hamin’s expression hardened.

“Uh, um? Should I study before we go then?”

“The textbooks are at home?”

“That’s not the case.”

Hamin hesitated. After enduring a battle that could be described as a war, the Academy was closed for maintenance and rest for the students and teachers, so the idea of Yoon Hamin bringing textbooks had vanished.

Still, it wasn’t that there was no way to go about it, so I subtly mentioned a possible solution.

“Should we ask Orca to look at them together?”

“That’s one way, but should I contact her?”

Hamin snapped his fingers and pulled out his device. A month had passed swiftly, and with a month of resting, it wouldn’t be easy to catch up with the classwork through self-study.

Even though he thought it might be a burden on Orca, Hamin dialed her number with a feeling of grasping at straws towards his goal.

[—Hello? Yoon Hamin?]

He set the device down slightly and switched to a speakerphone mode, seeming to invite me to listen in as well.

“How have you been, Orca?”

[I’ve been well. It’s a bit disappointing that the sword I lent you melted away.]

“That’s…”

[You don’t have to worry about compensation. I believe we won’t have any more fights beyond the Barrier.]

He wanted to ask if they could look at the textbooks together, but he seemed to lose his words at the mention of the sword.

“Text, book.”

I mouthed the words exaggeratedly next to Yoon Hamin, and glancing at me nervously, Hamin alternated his gaze between the device and me, looking anxious.

It seemed he was lost about what to do while sweating nervously, but after a brief moment, he finally spoke.

“Um, um, sorry. By any chance, could you lend me some textbooks…? Or maybe Kanna and I could learn a bit at your house…”

It was a slightly unreasonable request, but returning to the Academy like this would mean certain failure, so he had no other choice.

Orca fell silent upon hearing Yoon Hamin’s sudden request.

[…Textbooks?]

“Yeah, I haven’t been to the Academy, and I don’t have all the textbooks.”

[I don’t have any.]

“Really?”

[Yes, really. I wouldn’t lie about something like this. Since I kept attending classes, I didn’t carry around any important textbooks like that.]

“Ah…”

Yoon Hamin sighed. I felt the same way.

Thinking about it, we weren’t the only ones who didn’t know the class content from not going to the Academy. Orca would have likely been reviewing her lessons in a relaxed manner, preparing for her family business.

Summary notes?

As that word crossed my mind, Orca proposed something.

[But I do have a few summary notes. Would you like to see them? They won’t cover every subject, though.]

“Uh, really?”

[Yes, really. But you’ll have to come and copy them. I need to look at them, too.]

“Then, then we’ll go.”

[I see Kanna is coming too?]

“Um, yeah. We have to study together.”

[Great. It would be nice if you both choose a day to come.]

Orca said this and then asked about other matters. But since our business was just this, the call naturally ended.

Thinking I would have no solutions without textbooks, leading to a drop in grades, I was relieved to find that there was still an escape route.

“That’s a relief. If Orca had said she didn’t have any summary notes, we would have been completely doomed.”

Hamin seemed to exhale deeply, as if relieved.

I chuckled at that.

“Right? I was wondering what kind of confidence you had to be the top student, but it seems you had a reason?”

“No, that was your comment.”

“Yeah, I said it. But wouldn’t you have figured it out eventually?”

“…That’s probably true… I’m not that close with Orca though.”

Suddenly?

“Wha… who said anything?”

Seeing Hamin fidgeting, I couldn’t grasp the situation, but it gave me a strange feeling. My head tilted instinctively, and Yoon Hamin let out a deep sigh beside me.

“Seriously.”

“…So, who said anything…”

Yoon Hamin gently pushed me, trying to topple me. He positioned himself on top of me, lying back on the sofa, gazing down at me.

Sometimes I couldn’t understand what Yoon Hamin was thinking, and this was just such a moment.

“…I thought you were upset.”

“Huh?”

“You know how some people get subtly annoyed when their boyfriend talks to other girls?”

Yoon Hamin realized he hadn’t meant to think that and seemed a little flustered, beginning to mumble as he couldn’t keep his mouth shut. I struggled to suppress my laughter at that.

“Do I look like that kind of person?”

“…So it’s okay if I talk to girls then?”

“Instead, if I have to put up with you talking to boys, that seems fine.”

“That’s not allowed.”

Look at that? I’m lenient, but Yoon Hamin is a bit sharp.

I looked at Yoon Hamin with wide eyes, and his gaze didn’t waver.

“Really?”

“Really.”

Hamin replied with a sharp tone, moving slightly closer to me.

“Wait a sec.”

“…Why?”

“Aren’t we still students…? I decided to go to the Academy…? I don’t want to be a mom and go to the Academy…?”

When I thrust a shield in front of him, even the illustrious Yoon Hamin seemed to falter, scratching his head. His eyes wandered somewhere, as if

wondering whether he had any leftover condoms.

But I had used the last one that morning.

Originally, this sort of thing is influenced by the mood, and if there's nothing needed at such a timing, it's natural for the flow to be interrupted, leaving one to wonder about the next steps.

"Then let's go buy some. Get dressed."

"…Do I have to go too?"

"Yeah."

…I hadn't expected this.

Ch. 198 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 198

To earn money, part-time work was essential. Of course, finding a job was also an option, but no matter how good a job was, if one didn’t succeed in getting hired, it would merely be a story in a dream.

I wanted to get a job. It was the heart’s desire and wish of everyone who wanted to earn more money and have a stable job.

“…But isn’t it too much to cancel just a day in advance?”

He had hired part-time help for the afternoon shift, but after just three days, they fled, leaving a gap. He was already supposed to take the night shift, and now he was being asked to come in from the afternoon, leaving him to groan about it.

Still, whether he felt sorry for assigning him consecutive hard shifts or whether he just wanted to skip it, he stood there because they said they’d pay him 1.5 times the hourly wage.

Claiming to give more, they also mentioned that he could have meals three times within the set price, so he consoled himself with that and pulled out a lunch box.

“The pork cutlet is all ruined.”

At an unclear time when there weren’t many people, he tore the plastic off the bento containing the pork cutlet and as soon as he took a bite, it made a clinking sound.

He had just bitten into it, but thinking of the customer, he felt unlucky; however, he also considered that the customer could just be there to buy cigarettes and quickly mumbled.

Gulp.

“Yes, welcome.”

“…Ah, hello.”

With ivory-colored hair and violet eyes, it was an impressive combination, and the part-timer felt a sense of déjà vu.

Kanna had no reason to be curious about who the part-timer was, so she simply looked around the shelves. Hamin took Kanna around, showing her various items.

At first, she thought he was picking something to eat, but noticing Hoonami’s hinting gaze, Kanna lowered her head sharply and reached out. Having previously come to buy, she was now familiar with the location of the condoms and picked them up.

As she placed the items she wanted to buy on the counter with a crinkle, the part-timer started to sweat and began ringing up the sale.

Soon, noticing a box of condoms hidden between snacks, he subtly pointed it out to prevent any accidental purchase.

“…Uh, this isn’t something you eat.”

“Oh, I know…”

Kanna responded while fiddling with the card that Yoon Hamin had handed her. The part-timer had no choice but to swallow hard.

If she knew it wasn’t something to eat, wouldn’t it be appropriate to buy just as much as she needed? If it were caramel, at least that would make sense. Are there really people who buy boxes of three condoms?

Well, they say there are people who stock up on 30-count boxes, so I guess that could be possible.

Since there was no reason to delve further, the payment wrapped up quickly.

“Ah, I’ll carry this separately.”

“…Excuse me?”

“Uh, I’ll be using it soon…”

The part-timer tried to politely push the condoms deep into the black bag, but Kanna quickly responded that such consideration was unnecessary since she intended to use them right away.

Hamin looked at Kanna from behind and swallowed hard. He even thought about wanting to hurry home and escape the heat.

Whether she knew it or not, Kanna had grabbed the box tightly while bustling around. She then stealthily placed it on top of a bag with other snacks.

The part-timer stared blankly at the scene.

“Th-Thank you. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye.”

Kanna nodded slightly, holding up the bag, and Yoon Hamin followed her out while saying, “I’ll carry it.”

The convenience store part-timer was left staring blankly after the two of them left, realizing with a sigh that she was the woman who had said she would use the condoms soon.

It hit him that she was with someone. He thought, before being struck dumb, and slumped down onto a nearby chair.

He fiddled with the bento again, but as he took another bite, unlike before, his appetite had completely dropped, causing his eating pace to dramatically slow.

“…Life. I shouldn’t have said I’d play a substitute.”

As soon as Hamin got home, he dropped the bag in one place and lunged at me.

“Ugh…?!”

I thought the mood would cool down a bit since he just came back, but it seemed otherwise as he started mixing his tongue with passionate vigor. I couldn’t comprehend how he could be so filled with s*xual desire.

He had already released it in the morning; was he really planning to do it again for lunch and dinner?

My eyes involuntarily narrowed. Hamin’s teasing tongue, and his lips pressing against mine made it hard for me to catch my breath.

I was pressed against the wall, craving oxygen, and my body instinctively flinched. My hand lightly groped the wall behind me. My waist tensed slightly.

He trapped my arms and wrapped around my waist, as if telling me not to run away. Although his tongue momentarily slipped out due to a slightly relaxed posture, my breathing had long turned ragged.

My eyes were slightly unfocused.

“Ha, huh… This is too sudden…”

Even while I was grumbling like that, it seemed Hamin was unconcerned as he pulled me into the room. Just when I thought he might step out for a moment, he hurried in with the condoms he had placed on the bag.

“Crazy guy…”

It was hard to keep up with Hamin’s momentum.

Earlier, he had deflected a conversation with Orca about some girl, but now he was blocking me from talking and getting close to a guy, suddenly exhibiting possessiveness by pouncing on me.

In that heated atmosphere, I thought doing something else might cool things down a bit, but instead, after coming back from the convenience store, he was even more excited and intent on tearing me open.

Feeling slightly uneasy, I watched Hamin take out a condom on the bed. As I sat down, raising my knees, I looked up at him. He was groaning and seemed to be pondering what to do with the plastic.

Well, it wasn’t strange to be aroused after being out.

“…How do you use this?”

No, that wasn’t it. The outline visible through Hamin’s pants made me uneasy.

Had he been unable to hold himself back? Were the kisses deliberate?

My heart raced uncontrollably. It felt more like my heart was pounding from shock than from excitement. Suffering from the suffocating discomfort that made me feel like I might hiccup, I surveyed the surroundings.

“Can’t we go a little slower…? Since we just came back outside, I’m feeling hot and tired, and I’d like to rest…”

“…You said you’d do it when I brought it.”

“About that? Ah, wait, don’t take it off!”

I tried to resist Hamin, but it didn’t seem to matter to him as his eyes were already glazed over. His hands kept tugging my clothes off one by one.

Whether it was because everything I wore was something he bought for me, or not, Hamin seemed unconcerned with how my clothes stretched, feeling he could just buy me new ones later, and he pounced on me.

Three hours passed. I had no idea when the sun had set, and outside, darkness had settled in. My eyes were fully unfocused, and my body kept trembling.

The bed was supposed to be a place to sleep, but I felt anxious about whether it was okay to use it this way. I even heard creaking sounds that made me think I might need to buy a new frame.

I wondered if it felt that good for him to mix his body with mine while both of my arms were intact, and he was aggressively pushing me from all sides, fully intent on doing everything he hadn’t done before, which left me utterly exhausted.

Slumped, I sighed and let the air conditioning breeze hit me. Earlier, it felt like summer without the air conditioner, trapped in relentless heat, but now I could definitely feel the cool wind welcoming me as I lay still.

“…Ah.”

If I kept living like this, my lifestyle would be ruined. My arms were fine again, so shouldn’t I exercise some restraint?

If this kind of life intruded upon my academy life, it seemed there would be problems either way.

It was a headache, but I couldn’t think of a proper argument to persuade him. After all, my opponent was Yoon Hamin.

Once his mind shifted, I fully understood he would dive into me without regard for anything else. So, I closed my eyes tightly, contemplating how Hamin would exercise self-control in the future.

I was exhausted and wanted to sleep.

Morning came. Upon waking up, I was met with a truly horrific sight. There were used condoms scattered everywhere, and worse still, they were tied up like water balloons as I had previously instructed, which was even more ridiculous.

The sheets were not as dirty as I expected, but they were not clean either, and I let out a groan.

“Wake up, wake up, Hamin.”

“Ugh… Just five more minutes…”

“You need to wash up! If you sleep like this, you’ll catch a cold!”

I threw back the blanket covering Hamin and glanced at him. Amidst everything, it struck me as absurd that he had done everything and was now putting his pants back on alone.

I had been the one who slept n*ked under the blanket.

“Yoon, Hamin!”

“…Kanna, what’s wrong…?”

“The sheets are dirty, so either wash up or go back to sleep.”

Hamin, whether from tiredness or not, showed no intention of getting up. I glared at him with wide-open eyes.

After clearing away the condom next to me, I whispered in Hamin’s ear.

“…If we wash together, I’ll take care of you with my hand.”

At my words, Hamin lifted his head and took a dazed step forward.

Look at that… what a funny guy.

I let out a laugh but followed him closely.

Ch. 199 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 199

The time to go to the Academy was approaching. However, when I actually thought about going to the Academy, I could only conclude that I felt lost and had no answers.

Yoon Hamin had clearly set goals for what he would do after graduating from the Academy, so he would likely be fine going there, but I had no clear goals to justify my own attendance at the Academy, to the point of questioning why I was even going.

All the information I knew had become useless. Yoon Hamin, who fought on a rainy day, ultimately lost. On a non-rainy day, a battle occurred, and Orca, who was powerless and standing still after having her strength taken by Rendel, also offered significant help.

At this point, these matters were somewhat irrelevant, but since I had originally aimed to win battles, I could only sit there in a daze.

It felt like I was suddenly floating in the air.

I ran hard and thought I had reached the end, but it didn’t end, and my goal hadn’t failed, so I felt adrift.

What should I be running towards? Is it enough just to enjoy the day-to-day? Is it enough to just pass the day?

I hadn’t decided on anything about what to do after winning, and that growing emptiness enveloped me.

It’s different from a story. It’s not like everything culminates in a happy ending after all the climaxes are passed. I have to keep living, and this place makes me fearful.

I definitely felt happy at the beginning, but it seems like now, no matter what Hamin says or does, I would just sigh and feel like I was being tossed around, and increasingly, as time went on, I began to feel that suffocating pressure.

I clenched my chest and kept my mouth tightly shut, raising my head.

“…Surely, this place might not suit me.”

My wish for this world to be protected came from the desire for Hamin to have a place here. But when I tried to step outside this world, it felt like it was telling me that I had no place to go, causing me to hesitate.

Going out to the Academy, seeing my classmates, facing the teachers, and pretending like nothing had happened in society—it was a realization that it was actually too much for me.

Even if Hamin were here, the memories wouldn’t just disappear, so I couldn’t forget those events.

Like with Reika’s affair, unless the main culprit completely disappears, I had to live with this fear tightly held. But even so, it was clear that the Association wouldn’t disappear.

This fear isn’t going to end.

Whenever I try to step outside, that approaching fear would cling to me relentlessly.

The corners of my lips twitched. It wasn’t that going out of the house scared me. It was the thought of stepping into society that terrified me.

If Hamin were here, and with Orca too, I might be able to endure it. But I was also afraid of other gazes.

In front of them, would I be able to live a normal life after my limbs regenerate so clearly? That anxiety never left.

I wondered if I would end up becoming a shut-in, stuck in this corner.

“What are you doing?”

A voice that temporarily halted the anxiety slowly taking over my heart approached. When I turned my head in surprise, there was Yoon Hamin, peeking with a concerned expression.

After briefly making eye contact, I quietly watched him and soon opened my mouth.

“…Thinking about going to the Academy soon scares me.”

“Why? Is it hard?”

Hamin seemed to have recognized it as a serious concern from my voice as he asked with a worried tone. I hesitated for a moment and nodded my head with difficulty.

“Do you want to sit comfortably and talk? If you stand here, you’ll get a sunburn.”

I quietly followed Hamin’s words. Moving from the window to the sofa, I lowered my head deeply. Hamin didn’t rush me; he patiently waited until I could gather my thoughts and speak.

“I want to go to the Academy following Hamin and go to all the places I want.”

In the silence, my emotions poured out. My trembling voice represented my heart.

“…But I feel scared. I fear being caught again and even if that wasn’t the case, people might already see me with strange eyes.”

Those things I could temporarily forget would leave behind indelible traces with returning memories that felt like a curse to me.

A trauma that was hard to shake would not stop even if the main culprit disappeared sometimes. Overcoming it was incredibly difficult.

Could it be that this is why I couldn’t face the hostility and malice? My lips trembled.

Then Hamin took my hand.

“Really?”

The warmth that enveloped my hand provided me with a little bit of stability.

“Then Kanna can rest at home. I’ll definitely become a hero so that you can live with dignity outside the walls. Just wait for two years.”

Hamin said that and paused for a moment.

“It’s still difficult to think about what to do with the Association, and anything I say now is just hopeful wishes that might not resonate, but for now, let’s start by trying to get out of here.”

His voice, meant to reassure me, made me smile.

If I were to feel this kind of suffocation, if I had to live in a world that might not accept me, then perhaps it would be better to fight and perish.

I briefly had such thoughts, but what if I could erase that emptiness by setting a new goal?

Let’s save the world. Let’s save humanity. If that allows you to smile.

Even if it’s not such a grand goal, if I could set a small goal that could definitely become an impetus to move forward, would that be good?

If that’s the case, then I should take a moment to step back and choose. I can’t always act like I know the future. It’s not like I need to know the future to live or that I can only live in a world where safety is guaranteed.

“Is it a promise?”

“Yeah, I promise.”

Hamin nodded as he said that.

*

Even while feeling anxious, I eventually came out to the Academy. With Hamin and being a contributor too, I firmly believed they wouldn’t touch me and swallowed my worries while trying to enjoy life.

I was able to see Hamin and Orca, and since the incident, many connections had gathered around Hamin. Although I hadn’t drawn such fervent crowds while discussing reviving monsters, I felt that I would at least gain some friends.

In the meantime, when I saw a boy approaching me, Hamin would subtly push him away.

Because of this, within less than a week after the Academy’s school year started, I had already become Hamin’s girlfriend, and Hamin had established himself as Kanna’s boyfriend.

I can’t live like this.

Now, with such overt obstruction, my title has become officially Hamin’s girlfriend. A playful kid calls me Hamin’s wife, and Hamin enjoys that sight.

I was scared to come to the Academy, but now I wondered if I should quit because I was terrified for an entirely different reason.

“…Hey.”

“What?”

“Are you too fond of him?”

“No, I like it!”

My head throbbed, and I pressed my hand to it, sighing. Then Hamin gently approached and stroked my back.

“Are you not feeling well…?”

“I just want to do it.”

What is he saying?

“From the morning, you two are close. You look like a couple.”

“Oh…”

Ignoring Hamin’s comment, a playful voice rang out, teasing him, as he had already become popular in the Academy.

I also couldn’t help but wonder if those kids were being prompted by Hamin. After all, Hamin was so composed, while I was the only one whose face would turn red.

“Kanna, good morning! You look like you’re having a good time together.”

Amidst this, a presence approached and stood before me. It was Orca Lamiris, beautiful with her blonde hair and blue eyes.

Moreover, there was something so overwhelming about Orca’s morning greetings that I felt sweat starting to pour.

“…No, Orca, you aren’t saying that with the same thoughts as those guys, right?”

Pointing with my finger at the boys standing behind Hamin, Orca chuckled.

“Actually, I am.”

“No! That’s not…!”

“Isn’t it? From the atmosphere, it seems like he’ll propose to you right after graduation.”

At those words, Hamin suddenly gasped in surprise.

“Wait, how did you know?”

Surprised by Hamin’s reaction, Orca widened her eyes.

“Is that for real?”

It seemed that Orca was joking this time, but it looked like she had inadvertently caught a big fish. While I stood dumbfounded at the reactions from Orca and Yoon Hamin, whistles were heard coming from inside the classroom.

Students ran outside with expressions that looked as if they were about to shout “Extra! Extra!”

Since there were many people, there were various reactions, and among them, some might overreact. But experiencing it firsthand made me feel dizzy.

Wanting to escape reality, I covered my eyes with my hands.

However, with my vision blocked, I became more sensitive to sounds, and it was unbearable to stay.

Just as I was about to jump up and flee,

“Hey, hey, quiet! Did you forget today is the exam day? Please be quiet!”

Lucia, the teacher, burst through the front door, knocking on the door she opened to gather everyone’s attention.

I knew it was exam day, but being stuck in such an atmosphere momentarily made me forget.

“…Ah.”

“Kanna, are you going to do well on the exam?”

“I worked hard, so I believe there will be good results.”

Hamin and Orca encouraged me as they headed to their seats, and amidst this, my classmates’ stares surrounded me.

As always, I felt the Academy’s score processing was incredibly fast. After the last exam, when I was taking a short break, the grading finished quickly and the results were out.

And now, the results were in my hands.

Due to over a month of break, there were too many parts I didn’t know, and I was in a perplexing situation where I didn’t know whether to expect a good outcome.

Hamin approached with a beaming smile.

“Kanna, Kanna.”

“…What?”

“What rank did you get?”

“No, I can’t look at it because I’m too nervous…”

I just didn’t want to end up in last place after working hard. That was all I wished for.

Then Hamin muttered, “Is that so?” and slid the paper in front of me.

“I came in second to last. I got full marks in practical, but I messed up the written part.”

“…E-excuse me?”

It was an unbelievable outcome. While Hamin couldn’t help but be influenced by me since we both took a break, I still thought Hamin would do better than me.

“…Then I…”

If Hamin was second to last, did that mean I was last?

Sweating profusely, I slowly opened the report card that I had intentionally not looked at.

And there, my rank greeted me, having kept one person behind me.

“…What is this.”

As I muttered to myself, Hamin gleefully pointed to my report card with his finger.

“Kanna, our scores are the same! I guess we’re tied for last place.”

Hamin seemed so amused, bursting into laughter as he compared our scores.

We both got full marks in practical, but aside from the parts we studied separately, our scores were a disastrous mess, which made it clear that it was impossible to catch up with those who had been coming regularly for a month.

I had become the last in the Academy.

But it was okay. We studied together, aiming to become top students.

Thus, we decided to hold hands and step outside the barrier. I lived each day, waiting for that day to come.

Ch. 200 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 200

There were no major issues in living. Whenever the topic of the truth about the past came up, the Association, which had remained silent, received criticism and was criticized again during the clarification process, leading to the resignation of a member. However, on the other hand, some would scoff and say it was just manipulation from behind the scenes.

After three years of wearing a school uniform, I faced graduation without the worrying events that had been feared.

With graduation, my time in uniform would end, and from now on, I would move toward the future as an adult.

“…It’s amazing that I’ve managed three years so well.”

I folded my school uniform. A neat outfit with a white background and a blue border, it was a peculiar attire that was not often seen in normal schools.

Was it because, in a combat environment, without such attire, it was difficult to distinguish students from ordinary people? Or perhaps it was to recognize mentees during mentoring and physically move them back in dangerous moments.

Now, it truly didn’t matter anymore. I attended the Academy as Hamin wished, and at the end of it, both Hamin and I became heroes.

“Wasn’t it bad?”

“Just a little.”

I chuckled at Hamin’s question. Then I put away the folded uniform and got up.

Though I became a hero, I hadn’t decided on an agency. I hadn’t gone to the place where I did my mentoring, nor did I choose the agency where I participated in practical training.

That didn’t mean I was independent either.

I had packed a lot of clothes into my carrier. I thought about throwing them away, but I ultimately couldn’t part with the uniform and stuffed it last among my things. The sound of the zipper closing tickled my ears.

The experiences at the Academy were filled with unforgettable moments. Starting in last place and eventually rising to second seemed miraculous; it could be called the fruit of effort.

“Still, it was amazing that the scoring method changed in the middle and we had joint first places and joint last places.”

Of course, the joint top students were Hamin and Orca, not me.

If only I hadn’t made mistakes at the end.

It was a bit hard to casually joke about being weak in actual combat. Naturally, I felt quite frustrated.

However, I was able to experience firsthand that I could do it if I tried; I didn’t need to run away with thoughts of “I can’t do anything.”

No matter where I went, I felt assured that if I started over with determination, even if it took time, I could reach success. I felt my heart had become a bit healthier.

“It was surprising that we could make it work after such a forced decision about the last agency.”

“Well, it was really forced, but I think it was unexpected that it worked.”

Using his abilities and position, Hamin pressed down on his opponents with the achievements he had accomplished and his grandeur.

He said he would create an agency in advance as a vanguard for humanity to go outside the wall when humanity eventually stepped outside, making it difficult to distinguish Hamin, who fought for humanity, as a foe. Eventually, the only option was to nod in agreement.

Even the member had resigned, changing the definition of monsters, so now they wouldn’t view those going outside the wall with strange eyes.

It required a lot of time to get there, but it wasn’t an entirely useless wait; there was surely meaning in it.

“It’s probably because we had done so much.”

Looking at my packed carrier, Hamin finally adjusted his outfit. He wore a neatly fitted shirt and warm, stylish pants, and put on a coat.

As he fluttered the edges of his coat, Hamin seemed to indicate that he was all set and grabbed the handle of my carrier.

“Well, shall we go?”

“…Will this clean the house?”

I turned my head. In front of me was an empty house. It was bare and chilly, without any furniture. Perhaps it was because it was winter, but it was exceedingly cold.

I had spent three years here and owed much to it. I had a house where I originally lived, but I had tidied it up a long time ago, so this place felt much more familiar and attached, making it somewhat bittersweet to leave.

As I stepped outside, leaving the cold behind, there was a car parked in front of Hamin’s house.

A black car. Neither Hamin nor I owned a car, but this one seemed quite familiar.

“Good morning, Kanna.”

“Oh, Orca…!”

As I approached casually, Orca greeted me with a smile.

“I hurried over when I heard you were going out today, but thankfully I arrived on time.”

“Well, even if I was going out, I wouldn’t completely enter the wall, so there was no need to rush.”

Feeling both grateful and apologetic, I found myself feeling a bit awkward.

As I continued to speak timidly, Hamin, who was beside me, took over.

“I was thinking of saying hello, but I thought it would be better to talk leisurely when we have time later, so I planned to postpone it.”

“Just a greeting doesn’t take that long, right? Besides, what were you planning to take?”

“Well, from the terminal…”

“It’s just a matter of being a bit late or early, isn’t it?”

Orca said this while lightly tapping the car, as if to suggest we should get in.

When she offered to drive us from the terminal to near the wall, there was no reason to refuse.

Once I got into the luxurious car, my carrier and small bag comfortably fit in the trunk. As long as there was space, I felt a sense of relaxation settle over me.

“This is certainly more comfortable, right?”

“It’s comfortable even with three people in the back.”

Agreeing with Hamin’s comment, I nodded.

“By the way, what does it feel like to become the boss of the agency right after graduation? Especially one without any other name, just an outside agency. Doesn’t that feel a bit heavy for such a grand title?”

Orca seemed to change the subject, asking if the upcoming responsibilities would be too much to handle.

After all, I instantly became the boss of the agency with no experience as an agency hero, so it was only natural to worry about being overwhelmed and unaccustomed to taking charge.

“True. But still, there are only kids like Habar outside the wall, so I didn’t think it would be difficult.”

I shot a sideways glance at Hamin, who was sitting in the middle with his eyes wide open. Since I was also going out with him, I made the playful comment half-jokingly, balanced between worry and mischief.

As I did, Hamin, who had been looking a bit awkward, squeezed his eyes shut and spoke.

“Yeah, I’m like a parachute boss. But I’m good at fighting, so it’s fine. Outside the wall is more about fighting than managing anyway.”

I swallowed hard at his bold statement, filled with disbelief over his lack of competence.

“What if the agency boss is only good at fighting?”

“It’s okay, I’ve got a capable secretary.”

“…Se-secretary?”

My body instinctively reacted to the unusual word choice. Glancing at Hamin with a questioning expression, I noticed that Orca, who was listening, was also shaking her head as if she thought it was absurd.

“A secretary? You’re not planning to leave everything to Kanna, are you?”

“…Well, maybe better than me, who is only good at fighting…”

“If that’s the case, why don’t you delegate it right now? You already look like a figurehead, and Kanna seems to be the real power here.”

“No, no…”

Hearing that, I became intrigued and leaned closer to Hamin.

“That’s a good idea. If I’m going to work, I might as well take the boss’s position. I’ll do it.”

If I’m going to work anyway, a good position is best. I would get paid, be in a position of power, and it would be perfect for making Hamin work.

While it was a public office under the Association there to save people within the wall, coming out gave it a family business vibe with its two members.

“Oh, no, I’ll work hard.”

Hamin acknowledged his slip and quickly retreated.

As we chatted and laughed, we soon arrived near the wall. They say having a friend to talk to makes any distance feel shorter, and that seemed to be true.

“Finally, we’re at the wall! Look, there’s the door we created because of both of you.”

“How thrilling!”

Hamin said this and picked up his carrier again.

What was once a temporary door was now a properly built large entrance that could accommodate large vehicles.

“Once we go out, when do you think we’ll be back?”

I had my bag, and Hamin had his carrier. When I was about to carry those thoughts and step out, Orca asked from behind.

It seemed she thought we wouldn’t see each other for a long time, but I wanted to convey that we weren’t going that far.

We were just going outside the wall.

“I’ll come back tonight to buy groceries!”

“…Huh?”

“It’s not like I have anything yet, so I need to buy groceries to cook something.”

That probably took her by surprise, as Orca looked at me with a blank expression.

“Even if I won’t come that often, I’ll come to buy groceries, and if you want to see me again, you can always visit.”

“…I see.”

Orca nodded at my words.

“Take care. And, see you again. By the next time, I’ll be a full-fledged head of the family. To meet the boss, I need to be at least at that level, don’t you think?”

At Orca’s joke, Hamin scratched his head.

In the end, the three of us—myself, Orca, and Hamin—could leave smiling. If it was a permanent farewell, tears would accompany it, but the fact that we could meet again tomorrow and the day after brought smiles even to this goodbye.

“Then really, take care. Next time, show me the outside world too.”

“Sure. I’ll definitely find a way for people to come out.”

Hamin and I waved our hands and turned to step outside the wall.

Without any questioning, we handed our IDs to the staff standing quietly and crossed the threshold of the door.

With a rumbling sound, the great stone wall rose upwards like it was opening a gate. The small wall revealed a hidden tunnel, and that path was clearly the one we were meant to take.

On the other side was a new light.

I swallowed hard. Although I had been out once before, stepping outside for a completely new life felt entirely different.

As I nervously glanced up at Hamin, I found him looking down at me, equally tense.

And cautiously, we extended our empty hands to each other and grasped them.

“…Shall we go?”

“Yeah, let’s go.”

Thus, Hamin and I took a step forward to illuminate the outside world.

Into a new world.

Ch. 201 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 201

“Habar, why are you here instead of at home?”

“…I just stopped by… it’s too cold outside.”

Habar was lying on the sofa in Hamin’s office, staring blankly. He had come for help while he was confused about what to do with a prefab construction, and it seemed he remembered that location and came back.

Moreover, Hamin and I had come out from beyond the wall, so it seemed he wanted to see us even more.

“You have an air conditioner at home too. I know it has a heater function.”

“Yeah, but… all the kids come to my house to use it, and I don’t like it.”

“…Ah.”

I couldn’t help but sigh.

In a neighborhood like that, if one could escape the summer heat with an air conditioner and the winter chill with a heater, it was no wonder that people would flock together, no matter how small the place might be.

Also, since Habar had been alone on his bed, it seemed he didn’t particularly welcome that situation.

With his eyes wide open, Habar stared at the ceiling and, while his bed was nice, he seemed to like the large sofa in the newly acquired office and was

sprawled out on it.

Had I known this would happen, I should have included the sofa on the negotiation list.

I glanced at Hamin, who was sitting on the opposite sofa, organizing something on his work table. There was no one to send the documents here, so it seemed he was trying to set up the computer by receiving documents through the wireframe or only processing them online.

As the monitor and main unit on the table rattled into place, I heard a small voice say, “Alright.”

“Is it all done?”

“Yeah, it’s all done. A bit nervous.”

Hamin pressed the button to check if the power was on and couldn’t sit still, staring at the screen.

“What are you so nervous about?”

“Well, even though it’s hard, I’m called the boss, so I shouldn’t get caught off guard without managing things.”

“…Well, without a superior and without any handover, if you suddenly become the boss, it would be like that.”

Originally, he would have learned how to be an ordinary hero in there and then got promoted to team leader. He should have followed the steps to become the agency president.

But Hamin insisted on this being the place because he thought it wasn’t busy, and as a result, he had to take on a rough path without a predecessor, a superior, or a handover.

“But it’s what you wanted, right?”

I leaned back deeply against the backrest. The soft texture supported me, and I wondered if that was why Habar didn’t leave this place.

Moreover, the indoors was warm, making it an attractive space.

I too surrendered to this warm feeling and gently closed my eyes.

“That’s true, but…”

Hamin let out a grunt and soon seemed to have turned the computer on, sitting down and moving the mouse. The sound of clicking and tapping on the keyboard began to blend together.

“Has anything come in yet?”

“First, I’m going to check my email.”

Click, click. The small noise was not bothersome at all. In fact, it was making me a bit dazed. It seemed to have the same effect on Habar, as she lay on the opposite side, her eyes gently closed, falling asleep.

Her breathing grew quieter and steadier. She appeared as an ordinary girl with black hair, and I wondered how she could be the strongest.

With her thinly opened eyes, she closed them again and yawned.

“Hamin, shouldn’t we go out later and buy something to eat?”

“Yeah, we should. Since it’s a bit of a distance, we should go early… Should I drive too?”

“Then the way here will need to be better, right? There’s no such thing as a bumpy road like this.”

“…True.”

The asphalt was bad, and even off-road vehicles would have difficulty navigating.

Since it was natural, there were open fields, and occasionally, there were spaces where monsters passed. Although there were no roads between the trees, it wasn’t impossible to find some, yet traveling by car remained challenging.

“Carrying something with both hands along such a chilly road will be tiring. Do you think Habar would help?”

I shifted my gaze at Hamin’s words. Watching Habar sleep soundly without knowing that we were talking about her made me tilt my head.

“The question is whether Habar would easily help.”

I sat up cautiously after being momentarily dazed.

“Habar.”

“……”

Having just fallen asleep, she didn’t seem too happy to be woken up again. Fortunately, she wasn’t struggling against it.

“Habar, we’re going out soon. Do you want to come with us?”

“…Where to?”

Her curious tone was unexpected.

“We’re going inside the wall, and I’m going to buy something to eat there. I thought it would be nice if you could help carry it… what do you think?”

“Sounds annoying…”

Habar murmured as she turned over.

“I’ll buy delicious food. How about something like that… um, do you not like this?”

At that, Habar stared at me quietly before jumping up. Sitting up, she stared blankly for a moment before turning her head towards me.

“Food? I’m hungry.”

“Oh, now that I think about it, it’s winter, so there might not be much to eat. What do you like?”

“…Meat.”

That makes sense. Outside the barrier, there were only monsters, and if they weren’t grazing on grass, it would ultimately be just meat. Besides, there likely wouldn’t be any modified plants made for easy eating outside, so there wouldn’t be much to eat.

In that case, it wasn’t surprising that Habar, who usually found everything annoying, would react this way.

“Then how about we try some delicious meat this time?”

I cautiously suggested, and Habar nodded.

Before I knew it, the three of us were heading outside. I lent Habar one of my leftover padded jackets, and he seemed satisfied with the feeling, nodding his head.

It seemed like they had organized the path connecting the open area where the wall and the office were built, yet it still looked treacherous.

Hamin and I struggled while stepping forward, but Habar hopped happily ahead as if he was used to it all.

“…A bit surprisingly fast.”

“Maybe because he’s a local?”

I echoed Hamin’s admiration.

Was he cheerful because he was thinking about the meat? Or did he just want to hurry and eat? It had been a while since I had seen him looking so excited. Although his face wasn't very expressive to begin with, there were definitely notable differences in his gestures.

He was quite different from how he had been hanging limply earlier.

"By the way, is it okay to take Habar inside the wall?"

"Well… since you're the boss now, you should take responsibility for what Habar does, right? Of course, it's not like you'd take the punishment for him."

"Still, after spending time together, it doesn't seem that bad… uh, um, let's just make sure not to attract the attention of others."

Hamin seemed to be contemplating something, but that didn't last long.

With that final word, we crossed the tough path and arrived inside the wall.

Once the three of us entered the wall, we came out carrying one box each. I wanted to delay these arduous journeys for as long as possible.

While I didn't mind pushing this off, I wanted to avoid doing things like this until the asphalt was laid down. Of course, laying asphalt requires professional vehicles or manpower, so I knew it would take a while to wait.

I grunted and struggled while carrying the load. It was fortunate that my body had changed strong like that of a monster, or I certainly wouldn't have been able to handle it with a human's body.

Even though I was making such sounds, compared to the box Habar was carrying, it felt close to whining, so I didn't open my mouth casually.

"What does Habar want to eat?"

"……Um."

Before going out, when she knew nothing, she would only think of meat. But now that she faced unfamiliar things in the market for the first time, she seemed troubled.

Would it be correct to interpret it as anything that tastes good would be fine?

Suddenly, it felt like if she suddenly said something like “I don’t like the smell of sausage!” or “I hate seafood!” it would be problematic.

“Things you don’t like… you probably don’t know yet, right? How about we make a little bit and if you don’t like it, we can just stick to meat?”

As I asked while sweating profusely, Habar pondered several times before finally nodding her head.

“It feels like I’m raising a child. A quiet child.”

“…Habar is being called a child? That’s a surprising thought.”

Upon hearing that, Habar immediately called out to Hamin.

“I’m not a child.”

“No, I just meant it feels that way.”

“I’m not a child.”

“Okay, okay.”

Habar seemed determined to emphasize that she was an adult.

It’s only natural not to tolerate being considered a child everywhere, right?

“Well then, tonight we’ll have dinner at home and return. Since we need to close the office.”

“…The office is nice.”

“No way. If we leave the lights on there without working, it would be troublesome no matter what…”

“Hm, if we go back, I’ll have to kick out all the kids in my room.”

As Hamin tried to send Habar back home with those words, Habar pouted at the end.

Still, it felt somewhat chilling to think about chasing the other kids out into the cold room with the heater, so I opened my mouth while sweating profusely.

“By the way, since we’ve made this agency, shouldn’t we prioritize creating a new village as our main task…? It’s not good for everyone if it’s too cold.”

I wanted to prevent others from feeling unfair about having a heater and bed in Habar’s room while pursuing my desire to knock on the wall. Although I didn’t know how many more violent individuals like that existed, I thought it wouldn’t be a bad strategy in the name of prevention.

Ch. 202 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 202

Due to the winter, we couldn’t start construction, but I met with the villagers to communicate what we would do and also to inform them how things would proceed.

Since they were people who lived outside the boundaries of the law, I thought they might resent us suddenly coming in and saying, “Do this and don’t do that,” and regulating them like this. However, to my surprise, they seemed capable of living well even without the law, which was a relief.

It was as if the situation made them somewhat numb to the d*ath of another.

Other than that, I nodded in agreement to the fact that there were just people who couldn’t learn due to the lack of a school. I wondered if it wouldn’t be a good idea to build a school here later.

I thought that, but for now, building houses was the priority.

“…We need to transport materials within the barrier and then carry them here to set them up.”

They say machinery is essential for building a house, but even if there was something like that here, there weren’t any people to operate it, so we had to rely solely on human strength.

As I glanced around, moving my hands, Hamin touched his chin.

“First, we need to make a road. We should cut down some trees and select the land. It wouldn’t be a bad idea to pull out a car from inside too.”

“Right. By the way, do you think they’ll be okay with that?”

“Isn’t it better than having nothing?”

Like Hamin said, it was better than having nothing. I knew well how hard it was to endure during this cold winter away from Habar’s room.

Of course, given how they had been holding on until now, they must have some know-how as well. Still, knowing that Habar had a heater meant I couldn’t just leave it alone.

So, I placed another heater for them and even set up a tent to keep the warmth from escaping.

With this, I thought it would boost their motivation for the construction starting in spring and also help earn some goodwill, which couldn’t be a bad thing.

Thus, we truly began to work.

The agency outside the wall. The jurisdiction covered everything beyond the wall. There were fewer people than what the association managed, and fewer tasks to handle, but it was a world full of possibilities.

“I’ve caught my breath.”

“…Yeah. It’s tough.”

I nodded at Hamin’s words, feeling drained. Having prepared various things to meet people, I had gone back and forth through the barrier several times, and I felt my stamina had diminished.

When I didn’t go, Hamin would go alone, so even though it was hard, my situation couldn’t compare.

“Speaking of which, I bought this while we were at it.”

Hamin took out a bottle from the box he was holding, which clinked. It was a bottle that looked close to black, with a label that clearly indicated it was

wine.

“Don’t have wine glasses, but this should be fine, right?”

Hamin had brought regular glass cups, but honestly, I didn’t care.

“What kind of alcohol is this?”

“Just to celebrate a bit. We moved in and set up a new place, but we haven’t celebrated yet.”

I adjusted my sitting position.

“So we’re celebrating in the office?”

“…Something like that.”

Hamin shrugged, uncorked the bottle, and poured wine into a cup. It was neither too much nor too little, and he extended it toward me.

In fact, I didn’t really know how to drink such things.

“I have a childish palate, so I’m not sure if I’ll like it.”

“It’s fine. It’s not dry.”

“…Dry?”

Hamin gently pushed the cup toward me. I reached out my hand to take it. The clink sounded clearly and the wine inside sloshed.

And when I carefully took a sip, a bitter taste filled my mouth. At the same time, something fragrant wrapped around my nose, creating a somewhat subtle feeling.

As I breathed in through my mouth, the scent felt even more pronounced.

But what was this subtlety? It was good, yet I couldn’t adapt, so I struggled to maintain my expression.

“I guess I’m not meant for alcohol.”

“I’m not sure either. I just wanted to try something, but it’s difficult.”

It seemed Hamin felt the same way; after taking a sip, he set the cup down and put the cork back into the wine bottle.

“Then shall we go with this instead?”

Hamin went back to the box and rummaged for something else.

“…That’s beer.”

“Yeah, I hadn’t put it in the fridge yet since it’s winter, but it’s super cold.”

What he placed in front of me was a can of beer. It was small, but I could definitely feel the cold when I touched it.

Wow, I thought for a moment, and cautiously lifted my hand.

“I wonder if suddenly introducing alcohol will worsen our condition.”

I chuckled as I lifted it, and Hamin popped the can open with a sound.

“Really? I think having alcohol would actually be good.”

While wine had become popular lately, it wasn’t something you could think of as easily accessible. In the end, we felt more comfortable just holding a beer and chatting in our own way.

Without anyone needing to initiate, as soon as we cracked open the can, it naturally bumped against each other, and we gulped it down.

“Wow, that’s fizzy.”

“Ah, it feels like it’s making me tear up.”

The carbonated drink felt like it was piercing through me. The tingling sensation in the back of my head seemed to announce that it was really

cold. Shivering slightly, I set the can down.

“…Well, this is nice.”

As I remarked, Hamin chuckled.

He began to tidy up the bottle.

“Why are you doing that?”

“We should wrap things up and head out soon.”

“True.”

Even though it felt like a second hideout since there were only the two of us in the office, we ultimately had to return home. After all, the bed was there.

I cleaned up the wine and beer. Since coming here, I had hardly encountered such things as beer, but strangely enough, adding alcohol made me feel a light-headed sensation.

I realized I wasn’t very good with alcohol.

Sniffling, I stepped outside with my padding on. Hamin also came out of the office and stood beside me.

We stood in awe, facing the fading glow of the sunset. Winter, indeed, made the sun set quickly. Even though I got off work fairly early, it was already getting dark, which was quite intriguing.

“It’s beautiful.”

I took in the scenery and expressed my thoughts. If the surrounding trees hadn’t been cut down here, I would never have seen this view.

A spot on high ground, it had a strange atmosphere as if it could capture the world in one glance. Waves of sunset sprinkled across the cold and white world.

In that mysterious moment where warmth and cold coexisted, Hamin subtly approached my side.

“…Kanna.”

At Hamin’s call, I turned my head. His voice seemed to urge me to look at him, not just the sunset.

Why? I wondered, but before I could question further, Hamin knelt before me, taking something out of his pocket and offering it.

Inside a ring box was a ring. It was a beautiful ring with sparkling gemstones. Looking at it, I felt my mind go blank.

“…Oh.”

“Will you marry me?”

My heart raced. Was it because of the cold, or was it because of the wine I had just drunk? What was clear was that Hamin’s eyes shone hotter in the sunset light.

Suddenly having a ring thrust in front of me caught me off guard. I didn’t know how to react in this situation. I hesitated, struggling to speak, and even hesitated to reach out my hand, but Hamin patiently waited without saying anything.

I trembled at the corners of my mouth, carefully speaking.

“…Uh, I can’t just let you stay like that; your knee will get cold.”

I then reached out and took the ring Hamin was offering. The jewel sparkled beautifully in the sunset light, revealing its presence.

Hamin grinned widely when I took the ring.

“You’re really something else.”

I bowed my head deeply. I put the ring on my finger and held it up to see it glimmering in the sunset. It shone beautifully, reminiscent of Hamin's eyes, making me feel dazed.

I looked closely.

"…When did you prepare this?"

I felt a surge of emotions, holding back a tremble at the corners of my mouth.

Hamin, seeing me, smiled with a mixture of sadness and joy as he replied.

"When you said you would think about it if I gave you a ring, I started saving up right away."

"You fool."

"Uh, why…?"

"That was then; this is now."

Saying that, I grabbed Hamin by the collar.

"You don't need things like this right now."

At the same time, I pulled him close.

Hamin bent his waist, and I stood on my tiptoes slightly to meet him.

As the overlapping sunset light gradually dyed the world red, it felt as if it was announcing its presence until the very end.

And we kissed, proudly displaying ourselves in that sunlight.

I like you. We don't need material things. We've come this far just fine being together, so what reason do I have to change my feelings now?

Still, I was glad that he remembered what I said that day, and with joy, I couldn’t help but embrace him tightly, wrapping my heart around my fluttering feelings.

Hamin seemed a bit surprised, but he gently closed his eyes and held me close.

As we broke apart, our eyes met at a very close distance and my heart raced wildly.

“I like you.”

“I love you.”

Deepening affection, we stood there until the sun set, kissing each other without feeling the cold.

Walking together toward the same destination, hand in hand. It was what Hamin hoped for, and I too wished for the same. That’s why we held each other tightly.

We wouldn’t let go.

The academy came in last place. <完>

Ch. 203 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 203

“…What? You want to hold a ceremony?”

I thought about dismissing it as nonsense. However, Hamin’s serious expression made it hard to brush it off casually.

With no work at the office, I was resting on the living room sofa, and even sipping on a cup of coffee felt like too much. The atmosphere was… well, it felt awkward, to say the least.

“Yeah, it’s different from submitting documents to a government office; a ceremony is separate, right?”

“…Isn’t it?”

“So I thought it’d be nice to experience that feeling at least once.”

“Hey, Hamin. I don’t think that’s something we can do right now, is it?”

I started to persuade him, sweat trickling down my brow.

If we were to really hold a ceremony right after graduation, word would spread quickly, and we’d definitely attract attention. But I didn’t want to be in the spotlight, so I hesitated.

Of course, I understood the desire to hold a ceremony. However, I needed to realize that wanting to do something like that required careful consideration of various factors.

We had to think about the guests and even if it wasn’t a wedding with guests, there were still numerous considerations.

Who would officiate? Also, if we did arrange for it, where would we hold the ceremony, and how would we handle everything afterward? Those problems loomed large.

Furthermore, the agency was far from being a well-established one. With no one to hand over responsibilities to, it felt strange to think about going on vacation right after becoming the boss while leaving work unattended.

“Think about it: our agency has just started, and it wouldn’t be right to just throw aside incoming matters and ask everyone to carry on as if nothing’s changed. Plus, we have a village construction project coming up this spring; we need to resolve things quickly.”

I laid out the practical issues.

We could hold a wedding if we wanted to, but time wasn’t something we could easily obtain. Preparing what we needed would take a lot of time.

Because of this, I inadvertently ended up saying things that would discourage Hamin by implying that what he wanted was difficult.

“…Yeah, I guess we do have a lot to do.”

Graduation was in February, and spring was just around the corner. It was time to focus on material management, orders, and personnel for the village construction.

Although the personnel were just residents living outside the barrier.

“Let’s start by resolving our work first.”

“Okay.”

In the end, Hamin dropped his shoulders and accepted reality.

I let out a sigh as I quietly watched him.

The construction start date was approaching. The fact that spring was nearly upon us was undeniable.

Hamin was busy taking out documents and reading them, and if there was anything that needed immediate shipping, he quickly checked it on the monitor and typed away.

Hamin was the boss, and I was the agency's hero. But what could a hero of an agency do outside the barrier? The monsters that had been around had been taken care of, so there wasn't any ongoing work.

It was at this point that I finally understood why everyone wanted to be a hero once they became Awakened Ones. As long as the monsters didn't invade, they could live this life, taking leisurely walks under the guise of scouting and still receiving a salary; who would turn that down?

Now, I felt a decreasing number of applicants due to the fear that the barrier might someday crumble, but it seemed that this job would soon only exist outside the barrier.

While caught up in various thoughts, I cautiously got up from the sofa. There was no point in killing time sitting there, so I decided to leave.

There were things I had to do.

"Hamin, I'm going home first."

"…Are you leaving early today?"

"Yeah, I need to cook."

Normally, I would wait for Hamin to finish his work before heading home together, so Hamin seemed to be finding it hard to accept this moment.

I felt bad for always bringing up things that seemed unfavorable for Hamin, but the wedding talk was grounded in reality, and today, I simply couldn't do otherwise.

“…Um, okay.”

Hamin glanced around, but realizing there was nothing interesting for me to do, he seemed to give up.

If there were a TV here or some kind of gaming system, I might have suggested doing that instead. Of course, even if there were, I probably would have declined and left, so it was more peaceful without them anyway.

“Then I’ll go ahead and start cooking.”

“…Okay.”

Though Hamin didn’t want to, he replied with a voice that indicated he had no choice. Even nodding his head, it felt uncomfortable for the person listening.

If he were just a workplace superior, I would think going home like this would be socially awkward. But that was okay because it was Hamin.

I quickly left before my resolve weakened.

*

There was too much to do. I thought that this was what I wanted, but once faced with it, the workload was overwhelming.

Research outside the barrier. What was out there, what was the situation, and could people survive if they went outside? That was part of the geographical research.

Simultaneously, I had to check if it was possible to coexist with the monsters and finally determine whether we could show them a friendly attitude to live together.

Moreover, I needed to investigate whether people could live in this magical environment.

Ultimately, it involved ordering construction materials for the village where the monsters would live and examining the construction methods that could be replicated in the current environment.

Wow, there was so much more to do than what a hero typically does.

Given the agency’s position and the fact that I had taken on so much, it was understandable.

Working with Kanna after finishing up would be nice, but I started to think it would be better to do something at home than waste time here.

I might be at the point of going home today if I couldn’t hold on much longer.

“…Ugh.”

With so much to deal with, I could only ask for more time to finish up, and the wedding talk had been pushed aside, logic having overwhelmed it.

The gold ring on my left ring finger sparkled. Unlike Kanna’s, it didn’t have a gemstone, but it glimmered as a precious object that proved the bond between Kanna and me.

After finishing my work and letting out a deep sigh, I clasped my hands over my left hand. As I gently touched the ring with the fingertips of my right hand, emotions surged again, a mix of excitement and a sense of longing.

Taking a moment to organize my tumultuous feelings, I braced myself and started to prepare.

It was time to head back. Kanna said she would cook, so I wondered if I could eat her cooking today. That alone made me happy, but I still wanted to leave work together.

The distance between the office and home wasn’t all that far, but it was just right for walking together, so I felt more at ease with Kanna by my side.

The unpaved dirt path. Yet it wasn’t dusty; it was covered with a layer of snow, crunching underfoot.

“…I’m home.”

I opened the door with a creak. I entered through the porch into the entryway. However, Kanna was not there, and there was no response.

“…Kanna?”

Where could Kanna have gone?

I peeked out slightly. Since she said she was going to cook, I thought she might be in the kitchen, but there was no sign of her. There weren’t even traces of food being made.

An empty pot. The rice cooker was also empty, and the frying pan hadn’t been used. There were no new side dishes in the fridge either.

Did she suddenly not want to do it? That could happen… but I could cook if necessary…

The fact that Kanna wasn’t visible was what concerned me the most. I didn’t know why she was missing, so worry and fear began to emerge. What if something happened?

My heart raced. With anxiety, my body moved spasmodically.

I hastily moved around the house, opening doors one by one with loud knocks.

I knocked on the bathroom door and opened the bedroom to check around. The living room was naturally empty, and she wasn’t in the small room either.

The only place left was the changing room…

“…….”

I gulped. If Kanna wasn’t there, then I…

Where should I go?

My hands trembled at that question. I hoped she was inside, but if she wasn’t, I wouldn’t be able to handle it.

Please, I wished earnestly. I tightly shut my eyes and turned the doorknob.

With a creak, as it opened, I saw Kanna’s back.

“Hyieeeee!”

“?”

I heard Kanna’s scream.

As I swallowed nervously, Kanna, locking eyes with me, hurriedly tugged at the zipper on her back after wrapping her arms around herself, clearly flustered. However, as she struggled to pull it up, she lost her balance and fell to the side.

“Ouch! Ayayaya…”

Kanna, who had fallen to the side, sat there frozen, hugging herself.

Looking like she had wrapped herself in white, Kanna remained still without turning to look at me. Even without seeing her face, I could tell her ears were bright red, indicating her embarrassment.

I never thought she would be wearing a wedding dress alone like this.

“…When did you prepare something like this?”

As I asked with surprise and joy, Kanna slightly lifted her body. Frustrated and feeling defeated, it seemed she had given up on taking off the dress or pulling up the zipper, resigning herself to whatever would happen.

“…Do you want to eat first? Or do you want…?”

“But there’s no food.”

“…Then, then, do you want to take a bath first?”

It seemed Kanna was stumbling over her words, her tongue tied.

Weren’t there originally three options? Now that one was gone, she moved to the next without hesitation.

“Did you want to do this today?”

“No! I just thought I’d try it on secretly, but you came back sooner than I expected… and the zipper wouldn’t go up…”

Kanna seemed to be very displeased, indicating it was supposed to be a surprise for later.

I see, since it had been discovered, she was just going with the flow now.

“Did you plan on showing it to me originally?”

“…It seemed like you wanted to go on a honeymoon.”

As she said that, Kanna quickly turned her head away.

“You came here because of me… So that much…”

Even that appearance was adorable, and I couldn’t help but rush toward Kanna, who was in the wedding dress.

“Whoa?! W-wash first!”

Ch. 204 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 204

Moonlighting, honeymoon. It was a term that referred to newlyweds and, at the same time, meant a sweet time that was literally like honey.

We exchanged rings but did not hold a ceremony. Still, even without a ceremony, we were not exactly not a couple.

I felt a bit guilty for trampling on Hamin's dream of a wedding, even though it wasn't my intention. The reality made me say what I did, and it was inevitable that he felt down after hearing it.

It wasn't something to be concerned about, but who wouldn't be concerned in such a situation?

So, I tried to prepare a surprise for him, but when trying on what I secretly bought for the first time, I got caught by Hamin.

Hamin returned home earlier than I thought, and I took too much time pulling up the zipper on my back.

While struggling without fully covering my back, I blurted out something to defuse the situation after being caught by Hamin.

I had to suppress my embarrassment and say what I wanted to say after being fully prepared mentally, but I wasn't in a state to prepare.

I originally wanted to say, "Bath first? Food first? Or me?" but I was so embarrassed that I forgot my lines, and in the end, I only ended up teasing Hamin, almost feeling like I was about to be overpowered.

That’s why it’s not good for people to do things they usually wouldn’t do…!

I squeezed my eyes shut. Hamin, carefully placing his hands on my waist under the fluttering white dress, pushed his hands in.

We kissed without thinking about moving anywhere from the fitting room. With my eyes squeezed shut, Hamin pressed his lips to mine, then opened his mouth and extended his tongue.

With a small slurp, his tongue slipped between my lips and brushed against my teeth. The tongue, forcibly filling my mouth, intertwined with mine fervently.

“Mmm, mm…”

Hamin, holding my arms tightly to prevent me from moving, intertwined his tongue with mine several times until he finally pulled away, breathing heavily.

When I frowned and looked at Hamin, his gaze on me appeared to shine brightly beyond my blurred vision.

“…Hah…”

After a moment of small moaning, Hamin swallowed and whispered.

“…We can consider today as our wedding day, right?”

“……”

I couldn’t say anything. My breath was quickening, my heart was pounding, and I was too busy trying to calm my chest to bite my lip.

Hamin seemed to understand something from my silence as he nodded and said.

“I’ll take today as our first night.”

As if extremely grateful, he hugged me tightly with care. His arm traced along my bare back, and he soon loosened my dress that surrounded my chest a bit.

The loosened dress slipped off, revealing the small area of underwear that I was wearing underneath.

“Uh… Are we going to do it here? Now that you’re off work, shouldn’t we wash up first…”

“…But.”

The word first night seemed to excite Hamin, and at the same time, it approached an unbearable environment for him, making him hesitate and m*an at my suggestion as if he were in pain.

Even though I was just in a white dress, giving off the vibe of a bride instead of a wedding ceremony, seeing him this happy was rewarding, yet it was burdensome to stop Hamin, who was approaching like a beast in an unprepared situation.

I felt a tugging sensation in my stomach. Just looking at Hamin’s eyes, I felt like he would get me pregnant. It was a bit intimidating. I had been trying to minimize such actions for a long time, and now it felt like the reaction was coming back to me.

I had just barely reduced the frequent actions we had since freshman year now that we were in our third year…

“Okay, I’ll wash up quickly.”

“…Uh, mm.”

I nodded, and we smoothly moved the scene from the fitting room to the bedroom.

How much time had passed? Hamin entered the room, shaking off his hair, and I was waiting for him in the dress.

I didn’t change because I felt he liked how I looked in the dress, but it was indeed embarrassing to be like this.

If we had held a wedding, I would have had to wear something like this in front of many people, yet it felt strange that it could be that way.

Seeing me sitting on the bed, Hamin approached as if relieved.

“Is that a sigh of relief?”

I wondered if he was worried I had changed out of the dress, but it seemed I was right as Hamin’s body suddenly covered me.

There was originally no veil. However, aside from the zipper on my back, I had worn it properly, which seemed to heighten Hamin’s excitement.

“I love you.”

“…W-wait a minute, wasn’t there a condom?”

I hadn’t cared about whether we had one or not for several days already due to the decrease in actions. Since coming here, I had been too busy working to think about anything else.

My hand, covered with elbow-length gloves, groped around the bed. But that hand was soon restrained.

“Ugh.”

“…You know, it’s said that making a baby is what you do on your first night.”

“Eh…? W-wait.”

Hamin seemed determined not to let me go as he covered my mouth with his, and his knee pressed between my legs to keep them apart.

Even if I wanted to close my legs before our thighs touched, Hamin’s leg restrained me instead. It turned into a situation where I was unwittingly

squeezing his leg.

I shrank back and twisted my waist, but Hamin followed and pulled me closer.

“Ah!?”

Suddenly, as Hamin’s body moved like a seizure, his knee pressed hard against my groin. With something other than my body touching in an unprepared state, I reacted even more violently.

“…You really look beautiful in that dress.”

After pulling away my lips, he gazed gently at my face and stroked my chin. He then traced along my jawline and ran his fingers through my hair, sniffing it.

It felt like a shiver running down my spine, but since it was Hamin, the feeling of rejection was less.

Looking up at him with a stiff expression, his hand slowly went down.

Thanks to Hamin, who lowered the zipper I had barely zipped up, I suddenly felt the loose dress press against me, and my chest was fully revealed.

The deliberately chosen minimal area of my bra fell open helplessly, and he began to caress my bare chest.

“Ah…!”

When he gripped my n*pple lightly with his fingers, my body twitched as if I had been pinched.

Frowning, when I glared at Hamin, he quickly averted his gaze and smiled. His playful expression indicated he seemed to enjoy this sensation, which was a bit infuriating.

He positioned himself atop my puffy dress and repeated the act of touching my chest for some time.

After he savored the soft sensation, he lowered his body and began to lift my skirt.

“…Ah.”

As he grabbed my thighs between my stockings and garters, feeling the cold sensation caused me to involuntarily m*an.

“Ah, sorry.”

“It’s just… cold…”

When I said that, Hamin responded with, “Is that so? I’ll be careful,” and continued his actions cautiously. However, instead of being cautious, he was indeed warming his hands by touching the inside of my thighs.

When I was shivering, Hamin removed all layers of fabric and lightly touched my panties. Even though there was fabric in between, I could still feel his touch through his fingers, causing my legs to close instinctively.

Of course, due to Hamin’s leg between us, I couldn’t completely close my legs.

“How does it feel?”

“…I-it’s just okay.”

“Then how about this?”

Hamin began to press, press on my intimate area here and there. He was intentionally poking around with his fingers, searching for cracks, and trying to target the surrounding areas.

Every time he did this, my body twitched, and Hamin was purposefully watching my reactions.

It was a situation where even after all that touching, I would only twitch and not progress at all, making me wonder how much longer he intended to enjoy this.

“It’s just… eek.”

The fingers that were merely pressing began to explore. Amidst the slight pressure, moving fingers were now attempting to probe.

Dancing on my panties, the fingers began to burrow into my folds, trying to push through.

“Uh, wait a minute…”

“Do you like it?”

“No, aah…”

The thick skirt made it nearly impossible for me to reach out for Hamin while he pushed through with his arms. Eventually realizing I couldn’t stop him, I covered my mouth with both of my hands.

As much as I couldn’t reach Hamin, he couldn’t remove the hands covering my mouth either, not while torturing my intimate area over my panties.

However, Hamin seemed to be enjoying the situation as he moved his fingers unfalteringly.

To torment me while I wore my panties felt like he had no intention of progressing at all; it felt like I was being teased.

My waist began to twitch. My panties were getting wet, and the damp, sticky sensation was transmitted through to my skin.

“Ugh, mm…”

I tried to stop the moans escaping my mouth, but the pressure in my hands loosened, and needing to breathe led me to let out distinct moans.

“Ah, no. I didn’t mean to… ah!”

I weakly succumbed to Hamin’s fingers. The sensations didn’t feel as intense as before, but the heat continued to build with no intention of cooling down.

“Haah, Kanna…”

After thoroughly tormenting me, Hamin grabbed my waist and pulled me toward him.

My light body moved along with Hamin’s pull. He slid my panties to the side and tried to fit his member into my wet folds.

“Ugh…”

The member pushing inside felt as if it were forcibly widening me. With my eyes tightly shut, I let out moans as I soon felt myself stuffed full.

“More, I can’t take any more… ah, ah.”

Before I could express myself with a weak voice, Hamin moved his hips with a shudder.

The squelching sound and the sensation of being filled became an electric current that flowed along my back.

Ch. 205 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 205

The body trembled. Hamin seemed to take it as a sign of pleasure and moved his waist. Already wet from being brought to climax once by his fingers, I ended up accepting Hamin's c*ck without even intending to.

In truth, before accepting it, it was more like it just served as lubrication and the c*ck forced its way in.

The c*ck that had entered and filled me seemed unsatisfied, poking and prodding inside. It felt as though it was pushing deeper, as if there wasn't enough space to go further.

"…Ah."

A ambiguous sensation, where pain and pleasure coexisted, overwhelmed me.

Unlike before, there were layers of large, thick frills from the skirt between Hamin and me. In this situation where only our faces were visible, I let out a small m*an.

Hamin also exhaled roughly and thrust inside me.

Grabbing my waist with his hands, he moved like that several times, then tried to move faster, even faster.

"Ha, ah, uh, ugh…!"

I clenched my eyes shut and gripped the blanket beneath me. Though it wasn't comfortable to give my body while wearing this uncomfortable

dress, the intense sensations inside me made it clear that this wasn't the time to worry about such things.

"Ah, inside… Aah, uh…"

I couldn't help but be surprised by the sweet voice that escaped my lips without me realizing it.

Startled, I opened my eyes wide and covered my mouth. Did I really make such a sound? But thinking back, it seemed like I had unconsciously made such sounds more than once or twice before.

My body moved up and down. Since I was lying on the bed, it just looked like I was moving under the blanket.

"Kanna… I'm… gonna c*m…"

Hamin said that and then increased his pace. The movement of his c*ck inside me became even more stimulating.

"Huh? W-wait… there…! Oh, ah."

A strange sound escaped my lips. It felt like it was hitting a spot that usually didn't get touched because it was so deep.

The moment it touched, it felt like an electric current was flowing. At the same time, I felt pain. It was the kind of pain you feel when sensitive skin is touched.

I realized that the c*ck, which had forced its way in, was hitting the deepest part of me, the cervix, but there was no time to resist as my waist bent.

"Ugh, uh…!"

That's not even an erogenous zone yet…!

Tears welled up. But Hamin's c*ck seemed intent on turning even that into an erogenous zone, repeatedly hitting and scraping the pleasurable spot.

Pleasure and pain alternated. Whether the pleasure was pain or the pain was pleasure, it blurred the line between them.

The squelching sound disappeared, replaced by the sound of flesh slapping against flesh. In sync with that sound, my body flew towards Hamin's like a magnet.

Hamin's hands gripped my waist and pulled me closer, and each time, I felt a burning sensation in my groin.

"Huh, huh… I'm… gonna… c*m…"

"Me too…"

As I cried out desperately, Hamin also seemed to be holding back, moving faster and faster, now more intent on shaking his waist like a beast than moving my body.

Thrust, thrust, thrust. The sensation of the c*ck thrusting deep inside made my head go blank. It felt like if the pleasure got any more intense, my head would go completely white and I wouldn't be able to think at all.

Hamin's body suddenly stopped, and our bodies pressed tightly together. Then I felt something swelling inside me.

"Ah, ah, ah…"

Gulp, gulp, the sensation rising from inside covered my stomach. The sudden heat warmed my body. It felt like my body was burning up from the intense movement, and the breath I had been holding to endure the pleasure finally escaped.

Even my dazed mind became a form of pleasure. My breath escaped weakly, and my bent waist soon slumped down.

"…Ha, ha…"

As if I had forgotten how to speak, the room was filled only with the sounds of breathing and moans.

Exhaling roughly and letting my body go limp, Hamin pulled out the c*ck he had inserted into me and sprayed the remaining semen on my thigh.

I felt the hot sensation trickling down the inside of my thigh.

Too tired to say anything, I stayed still, and Hamin smiled wryly.

“…Unlike before, the erection doesn’t go away.”

Come to think of it, he had said before that even after pulling out, the erection wouldn’t go away.

“Why?”

Too tired to turn my head, I looked at the ceiling with unfocused eyes and asked.

Hamin hesitated, groaning, but the hesitation didn’t last long.

“Before, there was that… electric sensation inside Kanna…”

“What’s better…?”

“I like it all. It’s just a shame I can’t do it more when I want to.”

Hamin said that and moved his body.

He came to my side and lay down next to me so he could see me.

Glancing at him, his c*ck looked slightly soft after finishing, as he had said. While that seemed natural, since it hadn’t been like that before, I let out a hollow laugh.

After staying still for a while, I closed my eyes and slowly sat up.

“Kanna?”

“…Sit up.”

Since I had decided to serve Hamin today anyway, I thought I should at least do this much, so I reached out my hand.

Even though I was still wearing the dress, I reassured myself that there wasn’t much more I couldn’t do here.

“Ugh.”

I used my improved ability. Unlike before, I had become skilled enough that I didn’t accidentally discharge or anything like that.

It was so convenient to be able to use my abilities related to heat and electricity even when it wasn’t dawn, to the point that I could live here with just one power plant charging electricity.

Zap, I weakly stimulated Hamin’s body. The twitching c*ck quickly grew again, throbbing and asserting its presence.

The c*ck, now fully erect, was slick with semen and fluids, proudly displaying its smooth form.

“Wow.”

A gasp escaped me without me realizing it. But soon, Hamin, now more accustomed to consecutive erections, tried to move on without stopping.

“Kanna, wait…”

“Yes?”

“Can you come down from the bed and lie face down?”

“Huh, lie down?”

I groaned at Hamin’s words. Well, it’s not like it’s hard to find a position we haven’t tried, so it should be fine.

Following his request, I used my trembling legs to get off the bed and placed only my upper body on the bed.

Plop, I lay down as if completely surrendering my body. My buttocks were pushed out as Hamin had requested. I was embarrassed, my face burning. It felt like I was presenting my wet p*ssy.

“…Ugh.”

“Ha, huff…”

Hamin exhaled roughly and soon covered me.

“Hyak?!”

His body pressed against mine. I had expected this much, but I couldn’t help but be startled by the pressure and the sensation of his teeth biting my ear.

I twitched, but since my body was already trapped under Hamin’s, I couldn’t tremble any more.

“I like you.”

Hamin said that and pushed his c*ck inside me.

“W-wait, ah, just now, it’s sensitive…!”

I clenched my fists. I gripped the blanket tightly. I bit down hard and had to endure something entering my already heated p*ssy again.

The sensation that made my body contract, the stimulation that made my waist straighten, was given.

A tingling sensation rose from my lower back up my spine. The stimulation in my p*ssy was indescribable, and all I could say was that my head was going blank.

“Ugh…”

In contrast, the man didn’t seem to feel the stimulation as strongly, and despite touching the erogenous zone, he busily thrust into my p*ssy.

Groping and probing inside, he eventually hit the cervix, which was so sensitive that it ached just from being touched.

“Hyuk.”

It seemed like I would never get used to this, no matter how many times it happened. Tears welled up, but Hamin’s c*ck seemed intent on making me get used to it by repeatedly thrusting inside.

It seemed like the c*ck was longer, so it had no choice but to probe deep inside.

“Huh…”

It was almost a groan of enduring pain. It felt like my breath was being cut off.

“Ha, ha…”

Hamin exhaled roughly into my ear. The breath entering my ear made me shiver. Being pressed down by Hamin and being thrust into repeatedly, it felt so hot even though it was winter, like I was going to go crazy.

The heat kept rising, increasing the temperature.

“Ah, uh, p-p*ssy, it hurts…”

I didn’t know such a delicate sound could come from my throat. Pleading with Hamin, desperately speaking, Hamin heard that voice and gently bit my earlobe.

“I’ll finish soon.”

Hamin said that and increased his speed.

Thud, thud. The sound of Hamin’s lower abdomen hitting my buttocks was quite loud. Crushing the sensation of the rustling dress, his momentum made me c*m several times without even matching his timing.

“Ah, ah, ah, ugh!”

Even though I had climaxed, Hamin hadn’t reached his limit, so he didn’t stop, and this continued several times, several times, until I swallowed my tears and endured the climax.

And at the very end, when Hamin grabbed my waist and pushed his body close to ejaculate deep inside, deeper, I felt joy.

Whether it was joy from the act being over, joy from having s*x that could result in a child, or joy from the insane pleasure.

My mind was a mess, so I couldn’t tell.

Ch. 206 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 206

When I regained consciousness, it was morning. My body felt heavy, making it difficult to even get up. As I groaned and leaned on my arms, I realized I had fallen asleep in my dress.

Was it because I slept in an uncomfortable outfit that my body felt stiff?

My thighs ached. Maybe it was because I had spent several hours with something inside me yesterday; even though there was nothing there, I felt an illusion that something was inside.

I pressed down on the frilly skirt and tried to lift my legs. Just sitting up straight felt burdensome, and I soon found myself lying down again.

“…Ugh.”

I couldn’t get up. It hurt too much. It must have been too intense.

My legs were shaking, and I couldn’t rise at all. My brow furrowed in response to the situation.

I had to get ready for work in the morning, and I needed to wake Hamin, but I thought it was a serious situation since I couldn’t even get up.

“Ugh…”

I stretched my trembling hand out and tried to raise my body again. I endured the pain in my waist as I straightened up.

In an ambiguous position where I couldn’t get up or lie down, I remained still with my limbs sprawled out. I felt a heat in my waist, causing me to furrow my brow.

How hard had Hamin held and shaken me? This kind of back pain shouldn’t happen.

I barely managed to prop myself up, feeling something grinding in my waist. It seemed like the inside was throbbing with discomfort. The problem was that something had tried to push too deeply.

Moreover, the act itself was intense, and when I had fallen asleep afterward, the outfit was an issue.

Who would sleep in a dress like this?

“Hamin, Hamin…”

I desperately called out Hamin’s name. Hamin stirred at my call, his eyes fluttering open, and soon he turned his gaze toward me in response to my voice.

“Kanna? You’re awake?”

While he lay comfortably in his underwear, I was in a dress. This was a bit much.

“Mm, my waist hurts…”

“Are you okay?”

At my words of pain, Hamin abruptly sat up and began to caress my body. Then he placed his hand on my back and helped me out of the dress.

“I guess that’s why you slept in this.”

“Mm…”

With Hamin’s help in taking off the dress, the awful state hidden beneath it was fully revealed.

What I thought was just a tingling sensation turned out to show that my inner thighs were red and swollen, as if something were broken. Plus, the sticky fluids had dried cold and stuck to me, making me sigh at just the sight.

Surprised, I glared at Hamin with narrowed eyes, and he had a sheepish expression.

“…I’m sorry. Want to wash up?”

“I don’t know. I’m too exhausted…”

Having taken off the dress, I flopped back on the bed. I pulled the blanket tightly around myself.

“I don’t want to go to work today.”

“Uh, okay.”

Hamin gently patted my covered body.

“Rest well.”

“…Okay.”

His soft touch ran over my body once and then retreated.

It felt somewhat bitter. I wished he would pet me a bit more.

“Hamin…”

“Yeah?”

“…Don’t go.”

So, peeking my head out from the blanket, I subtly tugged on Hamin’s hand.

Upon hearing that, Hamin made a troubled expression but eventually nodded in agreement.

“Got it.”

I felt like I could spend a leisurely day. Although I knew going back to sleep in the morning would disrupt my routine, I closed my eyes, feeling Hamin’s touch.

“…Ah.”

How many days had it been since then? I suddenly remembered that my menstrual cycle had stopped.

As it was about time to head home from the office, I got up and looked at Hamin. I quietly approached him as he was finishing his work at his office desk, gazing at him intently.

Seeing me come closer, Hamin smiled gently.

“What’s up? Do you want something to eat?”

He stopped clicking the mouse and focused fully on me. That made me feel a little happy, and I smiled back.

“No, I just… wanted to visit the Barrier today.”

“Why? Don’t you already have plenty at home?”

Hamin tilted his head. After all, if I didn’t say why, he wouldn’t know anything.

It was a bit embarrassing to say something, but considering that Hamin is my husband, it didn’t feel right to keep it buried within me.

“…I think I might be pregnant…”

“Really?!”

As soon as Hamin heard that, he slapped the desk and stood up.

His chair was pushed back, scraping against the floor as it turned.

“Yes.”

When I nodded, Hamin’s trembling gaze shifted from my face to my belly. He looked astonished yet strangely happy, unable to believe that there was a baby inside me.

Hamin rushed around the desk and hugged me tightly.

“…You worked hard.”

After all, we had joined our bodies like that until a baby was made, shaking intensely until my belly was bulging, it wouldn’t have been difficult to conceive.

“…I thought I’d buy a test kit.”

I patted Hamin’s back.

“Then let’s just go to the obstetrician.”

“Is that really necessary? Let’s just see how it goes for now.”

“If we’re going into the Barrier, it’s better to check everything.”

After saying that, Hamin turned away. He looked at the monitor and busily tapped on the keyboard, then finally shut down the computer.

He seemed determined to wrap everything up and leave.

“Okay, put on your clothes.”

Hamin quickly moved to put my coat on me, and he wore his coat as well, stretching his shoulders.

It felt like it had been a while since I saw such a lively Hamin. These days, he either seemed filled with s*xual desire or worn out by work.

Even if I thought I might be pregnant, I had to walk to the Barrier. Since my belly wasn't showing yet, it wasn't a problem for now, but I couldn't help but worry about what would happen if my belly started to grow, and I needed to go straight to the hospital.

I wondered if Hamin was aware of that; his gaze dropped to the ground as we walked.

"Indeed, we need to pave asphalt here soon. I should get a driver's license. Should I first rent a vehicle?"

He pulled me slightly closer as he was deep in thought. Then he leaned against me as if asking for my support.

"Okay, walk carefully."

"…Are you being more considerate because I might be pregnant?"

"No, I just always wanted to do this."

"Not because I'm pregnant?"

When I casually asked, Hamin made a troubled face.

"Ah, the baby is great, but I'm not asking you to marry me just because of the baby."

His words made me chuckle.

"Got it. I understand."

"…After we visit the hospital today, you need to rest well. For a while, you

can just relax at home.”

“What are you saying? It’s smarter to get things done now. Once my belly shows, I won’t be able to work at all, right?”

Hamin groaned. It seemed he was more concerned about me getting a big belly than not being able to work.

“Ugh, we really should pave the asphalt like…”

“I don’t want to push too hard, but I’ll look forward to it.”

“Of course. If we need to go to the hospital quickly later, we need to have a car.”

Seeing his earnest nod made me smile.

The moment we entered the Barrier, we quickly hailed a taxi and headed straight for the obstetrician. Inside the hospital, there were pregnant women, but also many elderly and adolescent women.

I thought they must be dealing with various issues, while I gently placed my hand on my belly and smiled in anticipation.

I didn’t feel anything yet, but the fact that I hadn’t had my period seemed like enough proof to keep my heart racing.

As my turn arrived, following the doctor’s instructions, I took a pregnancy test, and afterward, I had an ultrasound.

“…The test indicates pregnancy, but since it’s still very early, we can’t see anything yet. You might want to come back in a month or two if you want to see the shape.”

“Doctor, so I am pregnant, right?”

“Yes.”

“Kanna…!”

Hamin, who had been joyful earlier, was moved beyond measure receiving the confirmation from the doctor. Despite the doctor being right there, he couldn’t contain his emotions and hugged me tightly.

“Young couple looks happy together.”

Hearing that, the doctor said with a gentle smile.

“Since the baby is just beginning to take shape, the father should treat you well. Until the danger period settles, please refrain from intense movements, and no alcohol or smoking, okay?”

“Yes, I usually don’t.”

“That’s a good habit. It can be dangerous for the baby.”

We listened attentively as the doctor explained what precautions I needed to take as a pregnant woman and how to navigate this period.

As we finally left the hospital, I noticed Hamin’s smile grow. At the end, he exhaled deeply with a “Hoo,” looking up towards the sky.

“Wow, this is something, I’m so happy. It’s overwhelming, and I don’t know what to do with all these feelings.”

Hamin seemed to stretch, but he looked dissatisfied that it didn’t relieve him enough. I couldn’t help but chuckle at him.

“With intense movements off the table now, I guess no more s*x for us, right?”

“It’s okay. It makes me happier that Kanna is safe.”

I had expected him to be flustered or disappointed, but he remained calm.

How frustrating. He’s so dependable at times like this.

“Humph.”

I turned my head away sharply. Yet, I still wouldn’t let go and tightly crossed my arms. The intertwined limbs felt like a strong promise to stay connected.

Ch. 207 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 207

Carrying new life was both wondrous and terrifying. It was a source of joy and worry at the same time. Despite the conflicting emotions clashing within me, I willingly began to caress my belly.

I tried to live ordinarily until I entered the stabilization phase, and at the same time, I avoided any dangerous situations. Being outside the barrier made it hard to predict what kind of crises could arise, and it left me feeling slightly afraid.

Isn’t it better to be inside the barrier during pregnancy?

However, my mom and dad could live outside the barrier without any issues, so doesn’t it seem unreasonable that a child couldn’t do the same?

As I pondered these various worries, time flew by before I realized it.

A month later, I felt my belly slightly swelling, which had previously been flat.

“…Hmm, could it be because I’m eating a lot?”

I had noticed that my appetite had increased bit by bit recently. It felt like I was eating a lot after getting hungry for the child.

But I had no way of knowing whether the belly was due to overeating or because the baby was growing.

Hamin observed this and smiled gently.

“It’s probably because the baby is growing. Want a bit more rice?”

“…Yes, just a little more.”

As I extended my empty bowl, Hamin nodded and refilled it.

Right, during the time I have the baby, eating is more important than dieting. This isn’t eating to gain weight but to ensure the baby is healthy.

Compromising with myself, I picked up the spoon again. It felt like my stomach had turned into two since I became pregnant, but it felt strange as it seemed like I was the only one gaining weight.

“Hmm.”

But still, I couldn’t help but continue eating because it was delicious.

Two months passed. My belly grew more pronounced, and I eventually had no choice but to go to the hospital with Hamin.

Tremendously nervous, I held Hamin’s hand tight as I listened to the doctor. During the ultrasound examination, with some strange gel applied, I stared seriously at the screen while lying down.

A cold sensation brushed over my belly. The doctor slowly moved the device and pointed at the screen.

“See this small shape here? Unlike before, the shape of the baby is forming, and this is a hand.”

“…This is a hand?”

Though I didn’t let go of my hand, Hamin’s body was leaning closer to the screen, as if enchanted by something.

He gazed blankly at the screen where it was said that the baby inside me had formed a hand, and then his gaze shifted toward my belly. His expression was as if he found it remarkable and wondrous that there was indeed a baby in my slightly protruding belly.

“It’s hard to see, right? It’s still really small.”

The doctor said this, but it was as if Hamin was already imagining the shape of fingers because he didn’t seem to hear anything else.

I couldn’t see things well, but Hamin seemed to be sensing something in his own way, so I decided to leave him be.

After returning from the hospital, Hamin repeatedly cradled my belly while gazing at it with a blank expression, hugging me from behind.

Hamin, whom I thought personified s*xual desire, seemed to develop paternal love, as he smiled just by being next to me and looked proud when he saw my belly.

However, as time passed, I was increasingly feeling unwell.

“Ugh…”

Holding onto the toilet seat, I vomited up what I had eaten that day. I wondered if I vomited because I had eaten too much, but that wasn’t the case.

Eventually, after looking it up online, I realized it was one of the symptoms of pregnancy and decided to just accept it.

Washing my face with cold water and spending the day feeling limp was tormenting, but I thought I could endure it since it’s just part of the process that everyone goes through.

“…Kanna.”

Hamin, probably genuinely worried about me, spent that day at my side without working. Now that spring had arrived, it was a busy time, and I felt concerned that I was causing delays.

“What about work? Didn’t you say construction would start in spring?”

“It’s already going well. Just focus on resting, Kanna.”

“Okay, I got it.”

I nodded and lay on the bed, staring vacantly at the ceiling. Occasionally, I glanced gently at Hamin sitting beside me.

“Hamin.”

“Yeah?”

“…I’m a little scared.”

“……It’ll be okay.”

Upon hearing my trembling voice, Hamin tightened his grip on my hand. It was admirable how he was supporting me, putting aside everything he desired for my sake.

Of course, I had no energy to show my emotions on my face due to the current discomfort.

“I feel a bit better.”

I said that and closed my eyes gently.

“I’m glad. Rest well.”

Hamin said this, placing his other hand on top of our clasped hands. The warmth from our hands made me feel really relaxed.

Spring passed in an instant. We wielded the saw and created an open space, moving materials procured within the barrier to the open area.

On the vast land, which was still enormous for an open area, the sound of hammering began to intensify. Since our home was far away, I thought it was good that the sound didn’t travel well unless you got close.

Of course, when I went over to check on the progress, it was reassuring.

The goal was to complete at least one building by summer, so I could see the busy figures of those involved.

Thus, as the construction progressed, a building with windows and a bathhouse was completed before long. People spent the day grateful that something was built before summer officially began.

A place to wash, escape the heat, and a safe space to look outside.

I stopped by one of the buildings for a moment to escape the heat.

“…I’m glad I have a separate space.”

Habar preferred living in the house she had been in rather than the newly built houses. She found communal living troublesome, so until she had a space to live alone, it seemed she had no intention of staying in this village.

Although there were only two buildings here for now, considering the number of rooms, it wouldn’t be long before Habar would be moving here.

“By the way, Kanna… your belly is really big.”

“It’s because of the baby. It’s not because I’m eating a lot.”

The truth was unknown to anyone. If I had gained weight after giving birth, it was likely due to that. But right now, I didn’t want to face that reality.

As I caressed my belly and sighed, Hamin unexpectedly appeared beside me and excitedly told Habar.

“It’s July now… so I’m already six months along.”

The pregnancy that started in early February had already passed the halfway mark. My belly, clearly protruding now, was getting harder to move.

Even staying still made me breathless, and my heart raced, making it feel nearly forced for me to go see the village during summer.

But just as Hamin said, if I stayed home too long, my legs would deteriorate, so I had no choice but to move.

“When is the baby coming out?”

“In four months?”

“Does it really take ten months?”

“Yeah, it takes ten months.”

As I answered Habar’s inquiry, Habar nodded while looking at my protruding belly.

“It must be cute.”

“Right? It’s a princess.”

As we laughed, Hamin also nodded along.

“It would’ve been nice to have a son, but I’m happier it’s a daughter.”

“…Why?”

“A son could share hobbies as he grows up.”

“But you don’t really have any hobbies, Hamin.”

At my words, Hamin froze.

“…That’s true.”

It was puzzling to wonder what he had wanted to share hobbies with when he had been immersed in work with no hobbies in a place like this.

By the time the son grows up, he might have developed new hobbies, but right now, the story didn’t resonate with me.

“Should I create a hobby now…?”

Realizing he had no specific hobbies, Hamin scratched his head.

I leaned closer to Hamin to whisper in his ear so Habar wouldn’t hear me.

“…It’s me.”

Hamin, taken aback, pulled away from me as if seized by a seizure. He looked at me with wide eyes, and his cheeks turning red made me feel a sense of playful amusement.

I chuckled and lightly pushed Hamin’s body.

“I’m just kidding.”

As I glanced at him, I finally turned my head away. Habar was beside us, quietly observing and pouting.

After we momentarily sought permission, the three of us occupied one room, and I felt a little sorry that it felt like we were just having fun without Habar.

He probably made that face for that reason.

“Anyway, we’ll be building more buildings soon. Hmm, before winter comes, we said we’d build two more, right?”

“Um, yeah, we decided on three houses. They won’t be that big anyway.”

The population wasn’t very high, but it also wasn’t small.

Forty people. It seemed inadequate, yet considering those who had died hunting monsters, it didn’t seem small either.

“If we build one building with five rooms on the second floor, it should work for two people per room, and if that’s not comfortable, people can sleep in the living room.”

Hamin began calculating as if he was well-versed in the affairs he was responsible for.

“If people want one room each, we’d have to build more… but at this rate, it won’t be done this year.”

“…Hmm.”

Facing the reality that his personal room wouldn’t be ready this year, Habar groaned and then let his shoulders droop.

“I prefer to just stay in the place I’m currently in. Anyway, I’m fast.”

“…Yeah, yeah. Do whatever is comfortable for you, Habar. If rooms are built later, you can move then.”

I envisioned the future.

Though it was modest for now, seeing the vast open land we were creating there was no doubt the place would soon flourish.

People would live here and create various things.

Eventually, when people start coming out of the barrier, the village might even become a city.

And if the baby that’s about to be born could enjoy living there, how happy that would be.

So I couldn’t help but smile.

Ch. 208 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 208

“Oh my, I thought you hadn’t contacted me because you were busy…”

A voice mixed with embarrassment and disbelief burst out.

It was true that I had been busy, but I felt sorry for completely forgetting to reach out because I had been living so hastily.

“Uh… I’m sorry.”

Feeling apologetic, I awkwardly smiled and apologized to Orca. She waved her hand as if to say that my apology was unnecessary.

“Well, if something like this happened, it could happen… I just didn’t expect you to suddenly become a parent. It’s just been a year since graduation, right?”

“Yes, technically it’s been less than a year.”

“Oh my, so you got pregnant right after the graduation ceremony…?”

It was early December. The moment ten months after becoming pregnant coincided with the time that had passed since graduation. Orca gasped, covering her mouth in shock.

The baby had just been born and was crying, and soon fell asleep from exhaustion.

Seeing the child wrapped snugly in a blanket made her seem incredibly small and precious. Hamin gently poked the baby as if to express his love

for her.

Her chubby cheeks were lightly squished. I never thought Hamin’s hands were that big, but comparing it to the baby somehow made it feel large.

Orca had rushed over upon hearing the news, but since she didn’t expect to see me as a mother, she still seemed at a loss for how to handle the situation.

“So, what about the wedding…?”

“Well, that’s…”

I made a face as if to say, “Is that even possible?” but truthfully, it was unimaginable.

Could it be that I had a wedding without inviting Orca?

“I didn’t hold one. We just had a little celebration with Hamin…”

When I casually glanced at Hamin, memories of that time came rushing back.

No matter how much one is newlywed, one wouldn’t wear a dress, yet Hamin seemed fond of it, mixing his body with mine until it felt like I was going to lose my waistline, so there’s no way I could forget it.

Anyway, that was a concern for later.

“It just happened like this because the timing didn’t match.”

“…You really are fast-paced. Having a child at that age.”

“Hahaha…”

It was hard to argue against Orca’s words, so I only smiled awkwardly.

“By the way, what’s the baby’s name? You must have chosen one, right?”

“Well… I thought my surname suited her better than Hamin’s, so I named her after that.”

Saying that, Orca briefly looked at Hamin and nodded.

“Well, Yoon Hamin’s naming style is a bit unique, so standing out in childhood might not be the best way.”

“If more people know, Yoon Hamin’s surname could certainly work in her favor, but I hope she can just blend in and live normally rather than stand out.”

I spoke this way and sent a gentle gaze. I looked at the sleeping baby’s face. She had just been born, so there were many swollen parts visible, but even that seemed adorable.

“…Her name is Stella Aurora. Isn’t it cute?”

Upon hearing that, Orca nodded.

“It’s a fitting name. One can tell she’s the daughter of Yoon Hamin right away.”

Her hair was still barely growing, and her eyes couldn’t quite see well enough to tell who she resembled, but just from the name alone, it was clear she was Hamin and my daughter.

“Well then, have a good day. Since I’ve greeted you and seen the baby, I should be on my way.”

“…Oh, when she grows up, I will take her with me.”

“Will it be okay for the child to stay outside the Barrier?”

“I don’t know. I plan to check after she’s discharged. If it’s not possible, she’ll have to stay here.”

I smiled awkwardly.

Whenever it was time for a hospital visit, one had to enter inside the Barrier. Plus, if something happened to the baby, we would have to come back here, so even though I was worried about living inside the Barrier, it felt like something we might have to consider once.

There were still many things to do outside, and Hamin had caused quite a stir because of me.

“…Is that so? If it seems like she should stay inside, let me know. I’ll help if I can.”

“Thank you.”

I replied with a smile for Orca’s thoughtfulness.

It seemed that the child was indeed blessed, as there were many offers to help from all around.

Time passed, and more time passed.

Unlike Orca’s goodwill, the baby was proving to take after both Hamin and me, capable of wandering around both outside and inside the Barrier with ease.

The child was growing up, and the time for her to start school was approaching.

The village was established, and the workforce to come out of the Barrier had increased significantly, so progress was quick, but since there was still nothing properly built, few people preferred staying outside, meaning the population remained the same.

No, compared to before, it had actually increased by one.

Stella Aurora.

Her black hair and violet eyes seemed to exude a sense of mystery, and her sharp yet gentle gaze felt like a combination of Hamin’s and mine.

“Mom, there are people living over there, and people living here too, so why is there a wall?”

Stella clung closely to me, pointing at the Barrier. Its enormous size made it visible no matter where one went, quickly capturing Stella’s interest.

Then, Hamin, now a father, took Stella’s other hand and shook it gently.

“There are people who can come out of the Barrier, and those who would be in danger if they did.”

“Why is that?”

In the stage of curiosity about everything, Stella questioned all matters. And when given an answer, she would follow up with “Why?” again.

So, as the father, Hamin explained every detail, and this Q&A continued until Stella nodded in understanding.

“Is it because people have harmed nature too much, and now nature dislikes people? Maybe we’re starting to be forgiven.”

Hamin came up with a rather plausible answer, and Stella gasped in surprise.

“Then do Mom and Dad like nature?”

“Of course~ we live in nature, after all.”

Hamin was about to start expansion construction in the village, prompting me to wonder why he was so confident. However, I thought it might be fine as long as they didn’t clear the mountains to build a golf course.

I carefully opened my mouth while listening to their conversation.

“…Still, for the sake of the child’s education, shouldn’t we live inside the Barrier?”

I looked up at the Barrier.

Honestly, being inside this place felt unsettling. No matter how many medical professionals changed, if the essence didn’t change, nothing else would.

That’s why living inside was indeed frightening, and though I wanted to escape, regrettably, there hadn’t been a decent educational facility outside even after my child turned seven.

No matter how much the village was being promoted, if there were no hospitals and no schools, doctors and teachers wouldn’t come either.

Without basic facilities, people wouldn’t come. Therefore, a lack of convenience was a natural outcome.

In the end, my conclusion was that for education, we had to go inside.

“Will it be okay? Of course, commuting would be fine, though…”

Hamin looked out at the paved road. With the emergence of cars, it was possible to commute, but that required manpower.

“I’ll have to manage it. I can just learn to drive, can’t I?”

I spoke seriously. Until now, I had been relying on Hamin to take me everywhere, but as the head of an agency, I couldn’t expect him to manage Stella’s school commutes too.

“Should I at least look into a private academy?”

“It would be good if Hamin could tell me.”

I glanced up at Hamin.

“You’ll teach her, right?”

“…Yeah, let’s do that.”

Hamin swallowed hard in response to my call. He seemed to be holding back something.

After making the decision, Hamin returned home to rest before starting driving practice.

“Ueeeeeeeng!”

“Ah! The baby is crying!”

Just as I was about to take off my shoes, the sudden sound of the door closing seemed to have woken the baby, who began to cry very sadly.

I hurriedly took off my shoes and rushed into the small room, where the baby on the bed was screaming.

When one child cries, doesn’t another beside them start crying too?

Before I even realized that fact, another child who had been sound asleep in a different bed began to cry sadly enough to drool.

“Ahh, oh my, what’s making our baby so sad?~?”

I picked up Luna, who had started crying first. I gestured towards Nox to Hamin, who was following behind.

Hamin took my cue and gently rocked Nox back and forth while hugging him. I held him until he calmed down, trying to figure out the cause of his crying.

After sweating profusely, having put the baby back to sleep, I glanced over at Stella, who was watching the scene blankly.

“…What’s wrong?”

“There are too many babies!”

“……That’s because Daddy is greedy.”

Now that I thought about it, Stella had cried when her little sibling was born. Perhaps even now, she thought being alone was better.

But what could we do?

“Daddy! Daddy!!”

“Oh, hahaha…”

Hamin could only smile wryly at Stella’s outcry.

It hadn’t been long since we had heard the news of the fourth child being born.

Ch. 209 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 209

About a month after I became pregnant, I had to minimize any strenuous activities or stressful situations as I entered a stable period.

Although it wasn’t visibly noticeable, it was a natural precaution to take since I was now an expectant mother.

Perhaps that’s why, or it must be because of that. Hamin started treating me cautiously.

Every time I was about to do something, Hamin would come over and subtly take on the task I was meant to do.

“Are you going to do this? Just rest, I’ll take care of it.”

It was merely turning on the washing machine, but Hamin discreetly took the laundry basket from my hands.

“Oh, are you going to cook today? You were planning to make something really delicious, right?”

He grandly said that on days I planned to cook, it somehow always resulted in a special dish. Though it wasn’t a lie, it just seemed to be true on those particular days.

“Kanna, you just rest over there. This is my task.”

Whenever I thought about going to the office to work, Hamin would say it was under the owner’s authority and wouldn’t give me any work. He even worked harder insisting that it was his share to do.

To a point where he now brought home paperwork that couldn’t be finished during overtime.

“Report on the human habitat outside the barrier.”

I thought such things could be completed during work hours to earn the corresponding pay, but that wasn’t possible.

The time he had to dedicate due to my resting was time he had to sacrifice, so I couldn’t suggest doing that work as additional overtime and collecting pay for it.

With him working so hard for my sake, what could I do in return?

No matter how much I worried, I couldn’t come up with a proper answer since Hamin would jump in and finish everything before I could even try.

Even if I became pregnant, I was still a housewife, right? Why should I be prevented from doing household chores, which aren’t all that difficult? Moreover, turning on the washing machine isn’t that hard!

“Kanna, what are you going to do?”

“…Uh, I was thinking of doing some work since Hamin is working…”

“No, just rest here.”

As I vaguely mentioned I would do some housework, Hamin set down the documents he was holding and stood up.

“No, it’s okay! I’ve already rested a lot at the office?!”

“Still, you shouldn’t be tired as a pregnant woman…”

“I can handle this level of tiredness!”

As I pressed him, Hamin looked flustered and scratched his head.

He was probably saying that out of concern. But even so, that felt too overprotective. It was a situation where I couldn’t do what I wanted.

Yet I felt I couldn’t calm Hamin with just that.

Sharing half the chores would be fine, and I would be happy just doing half the household work, but it seemed he wanted to do it all, which appeared exhausting.

Feeling awkward after raising my voice, I fumbled over my words and lowered my head.

In the midst of this awkward situation, I fled my seat while Hamin hesitated to call my name and swallowed his voice.

That night, I lay in the big bed with Hamin, staring blankly at the ceiling. Hamin let out a groan and then quietly spoke to me.

“I’m sorry about earlier.”

“For what?”

I asked, tilting my head. I wondered what Hamin had to be sorry about, so it came out naturally.

But maybe that sounded like it meant something else, as Hamin stammered and eventually shared why he was apologizing.

“I think I was too overprotective of you… I was a little scared, not knowing how much I should do. I was happy that we have a baby, and I was thinking about how to meet him or her in a healthy way.”

Hamin slightly turned his head. He glanced at me and reached out his hand. Our hands, which touched carefully, soon intertwined as if they had become one.

“…Being a dad is kind of scary.”

That feeling of happiness mixed with fear. I knew it too.

I couldn’t be unaware of the heavy responsibility that followed joy and happiness, pressing down on any desire to act, often turning actions into something excessive.

“So, I didn’t know what to do. I wanted to treat you more precious.”

Hamin kept his mouth tightly closed and quietly sighed.

Having just graduated and started adulthood, the fact that a person to be responsible for appeared right as I began social life was significant.

I knew how heavy the heart and shoulders could get, but I wondered how much weight Hamin was feeling.

Until he heard the news of my pregnancy, Hamin had seemed like a symbol of s*xual desire, but now he wasn’t even asking for it, probably because he was thinking of the child and my body, clearly restraining himself.

That must be his sense of responsibility.

“…Really?”

I whispered. I tried to look into Hamin’s eyes while holding onto his left hand tightly. I could see his golden eyes shaking as he sighed.

He was disturbed.

“Do you like me?”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Hamin swallowed hard at my words.

“So, just as Hamin thinks of me, I think of you too.”

I tightened my grip on Hamin’s hand. Gripping a hand bigger than mine was a bit tough, but it felt enough to hold it tightly.

“Now that I’m a dad, I’ve been thinking about how to handle things. Since I’m going to be a mom, I know you’re thinking about me, but I’m actually more worried about you.”

“…….”

“What did you do after you heard you were pregnant at the hospital?”

I pressed on as if quizzing him.

Though it seemed like a question, it wasn’t. It was merely to list what he had done.

“You took everything from me when I tried to do some housework, didn’t you? Cleaning, doing laundry, washing dishes. There wasn’t really a need to do that much.”

“Ugh…”

“Plus, you went to work together, and I sat on the sofa watching TV while you worked hard alone, taking care of my share to the point where you brought home paperwork?”

“That’s because… you shouldn’t be stressed…”

Hamin seemed to want to explain why he acted that way, but that only proved he was being overprotective.

“Pregnant women can still do well in their work as long as they aren’t full-term. If they get stressed out over those things, the birth rate might actually drop!”

I slipped my fingers between Hamin’s fingers. The hand that was lightly holding onto his firmly intertwined, making it difficult to separate.

“So don’t worry too much. Besides, we’re strong enough to live outside the barrier.”

“…True, I guess.”

Hamin bitterly smiled in agreement with my words.

I thought he might acknowledge the fact that he had been overprotective and return to a more normal life starting tomorrow.

“Then, goodnight.”

“Yeah, Kanna too.”

Now the conversation was over. Starting tomorrow, we could just live a normal life as we had planned originally.

Morning came. I slowly welcomed the day and carefully untangled my fingers from Hamin’s as I got up.

Stretching while sitting up, I headed to the bathroom to wash my face, beginning a refreshing day.

After that, I headed to the changing room separately. It felt like I was reminded that this house was bigger than the old one, perhaps due to Hamin’s dream. Exaggeratingly, I thought maybe we could play basketball here?

Anyway, when I arrived at the washing machine in the changing room, I placed my underwear inside. Because Hamin’s clothes and mine required separate washing, it was inconvenient, but there was no choice.

After placing it in the machine and turning it on, it started to hum with a buzzing sound.

“Ugh, this should be enough.”

I closed my eyes tightly and stretched again. Now, I wondered if it was time to wake Hamin up, so I went back to the room.

Hamin, perhaps tired from working hard, seemed to still be in dreamland, and I looked at him quietly. I wanted to let him sleep more, but since it was a workday, I couldn’t simply turn a blind eye.

Is there too much work? Then just share it with me. I thought as I lifted the blanket.

“…….”

As I pulled the blanket back, I felt like I made eye contact with that fierce little boy visible beyond his pants. It looked like he was quite aggravated from holding it in for too long.

I thought men usually look like that in the morning, but seriously, I wondered if this was a bit too much.

Was he always like this before? I questioned, but unable to compare with tangible evidence, my head shook involuntarily.

He was already holding it in because he was thinking of my body, so it wasn’t necessary to tease him.

I covered him back with the blanket. After that, I gently shook Hamin’s body.

“Hamin, it’s morning.”

“…Hmm.”

Hamin opened his eyes slightly and glanced at me.

Should I say it was commendable? Seeing that, despite being piled up like this, he was enduring it for the thought of being a dad and thinking about the child, I felt pleased inside.

“It’s time to wash up and head to work.”

Well, that’s that.

“Yeah.”

Hamin rose up with a disheveled expression.

Arriving at the office, I recalled our conversation from the previous day as I waited for Hamin to give me some work.

As Hamin usually said, he would at least give me some work starting today. As I waited with that thought, Hamin stared blankly at me, tilted his head, and asked.

“Why are you standing there? Just rest.”

“…Hamin?”

“Why?”

“Hey, remember the conversation we had yesterday?”

Did you forget what we talked about before sleeping? I asked, and Hamin seemed to reflect for a moment, then sighed, “Ah.”

“Weren’t we going to split the household chores?”

“…It was all supposed to be half.”

“No, Kanna is just supposed to rest.”

“…….”

What? It didn’t seem like he understood?

I pouted my lips, but Hamin seemed to think it was a waste of time and started working.

After organizing some documents, he headed to the construction site for building a house for the people outside the barrier. Meanwhile, I was left behind in the building since I was pregnant.

“…Huh.”

I thought he understood, but was it not about work, only household chores? If that’s what he’s saying, I have thoughts too.

Hamin was working to the point of exhaustion, almost to the level of getting a nosebleed. Therefore, he should be given adequate rest, but the problem was that he was taking care of tasks that I could help with alone, leaving him no time for that.

Would he get anxious enough to share the workload with me if I made him rest forcibly?

That was the maximum consideration I could offer Hamin.

Ch. 210 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 210

The idea didn’t come to me because I was being lewd or anything like that. Absolutely not.

First and foremost, the thought that came to mind was that Hamin needed to rest.

Whether it was household chores or outside work, he didn’t want to hand anything over to me, and because he insisted on doing everything himself, it was clear that fatigue had been building up for him.

I was certain of this even without needing to confirm it.

Living like this for a month, it was inevitable that he’d be exhausted. Even if he had become someone who could live outside the Barrier, he couldn’t just ignore fatigue.

So, how could I help him relieve his fatigue? I had to think about it.

Even if I told him to delegate tasks to me or to share the workload, Hamin wouldn’t listen. So, that approach wasn’t going to work.

Was there another way? I tilted my head in thought. Since he took on everything himself without delegating, his sleep time naturally decreased, and without addressing the root cause, it was impossible not to feel frustrated.

Then, it was time to use the second fact I had discovered.

Hamin was in a period of heightened s*xual desire. But ever since he heard the news about the baby, he hadn’t acted on it at all. It was probably because of the sense of responsibility he felt as a father.

I could tell by the way his lower body seemed ready to burst every morning. As I saw this morning, he was trying to suppress his desires for my sake.

Even if he tried to relieve himself secretly when I wasn’t looking, there would inevitably be a limit.

So, if I helped him release it in this way, wouldn’t it also allow Hamin to rest?

With that thought, I figured out what to do.

Even though I had an idea, I wasn’t exactly sure what to do. After all, we hadn’t entered a stable period yet, so we had to avoid physical intimacy.

Of course, even if we had, for safety’s sake, we should still avoid it.

“……”

Then, was there nothing I could do?

No, there was plenty I could do. It might feel like a substitute, though.

I remembered the word “secretary” that Hamin had mentioned in front of Orca before. I chuckled to myself, thinking it was a clever idea.

All I had to do was hide under the desk and wait for Hamin to come. Since I had to wait around anyway, it didn’t bother me.

And then the time came.

“How is it? Since you’re not giving me work, I came to find some myself.”

“…What are you talking about?”

I smiled slyly as I saw Hamin’s surprised expression. It was the reaction I wanted, so I couldn’t help but laugh.

“The secretary under the desk.”

I declared this to him. A protest under the desk, directed at Hamin.

The conditions weren’t anything special. Just that Hamin would share half of his work and get enough rest. It wasn’t a difficult condition.

Though it might be hard for Hamin, who was stubborn.

“A secretary under the desk…”

Hamin was speechless, just staring at me crouched under the desk. I reached out to him.

My hand, which had slipped between his legs, soon brushed against Hamin’s groin.

Since he was in the middle of work and had just returned from the field, there was no way his c*ck was swollen. But even though it wasn’t fully erect, its thick presence could be felt through the fabric.

“…Ka, Kanna, wait. You can’t.”

Hamin, who would usually seize any opportunity, now stopped me instead. Maybe it was because he was thinking of the baby, but I didn’t mind.

“We can do this, right?”

“That…”

When I looked up at him and asked, Hamin just groaned.

While int*rcourse might be harmful to the baby during this period when it’s forming, simulated int*rcourse wouldn’t cause any harm.

“Aren’t you going to work? I came here to work.”

“No, Kanna…”

Hamin seemed at a loss for words. I glanced up at him and carefully pulled the chair closer.

The wheels creaked, and the chair Hamin was sitting on slid into the desk.

The space that had been spacious when I was alone became cramped with Hamin’s lower body in it. Wedged in, I leaned forward and poked my head between Hamin’s legs, which were slightly spread.

Just touching his c*ck through the fabric had already made it swell. It was rising with such force that it seemed like it would tear through his underwear, so I pulled down the tight underwear.

“Ugh…”

Hamin groaned, sitting at the desk. Of course, given the position, he couldn’t look down at me, but he seemed to be trying hard to hold back.

A massive c*ck, with prominent veins. The skin, unusually darker than other areas, greeted me. I wanted to touch it with my hand, but it felt a bit awkward to do so in this space between his legs.

I hesitated for a moment, then made up my mind. But that hesitation didn’t last long.

I placed my hands on Hamin’s thighs. After slightly spreading his legs, I pressed my lips against the c*ck that jutted out.

“Ugh, Kanna… W, wait, it’s dirty with your mouth…”

“…You don’t like it?”

Hamin panicked and pulled the chair back, but despite his words and expression, his c*ck seemed to writhe even more fiercely.

It might have been my imagination, but his body seemed honest, as if it wanted to accept me.

It was actually a chilling sensation. I don't think I've ever had Hamin's c*ck in my mouth before. But if you asked if it was unfamiliar to have a c*ck pressed against my face, it wasn't.

I still remember the time when I was washing him and ended up using my hand, and Hamin ended up ejaculating on my face.

"And… I don't think Hamin is dirty."

I ran my fingers over my lips. The sensation of it brushing past me still lingered.

"Ugh…"

"You know this is slacking off at work, right?"

"Kanna…"

He looked at me with an expression that said, "I've been holding back so hard, why are you doing this?"

When our eyes met briefly, I smiled with a sharp gaze and then returned to my position. Hamin would work on the table, and I would work under it.

"Ugh…"

When I pressed my lips against his c*ck, Hamin's body twitched.

It was as if he was screaming that he wanted to release all the pent-up desire.

"Mmm."

I stuck out my tongue and licked the underside of his c*ck. I felt the unique line of skin connecting the glans and the shaft. Wondering what it was, I licked it, and Hamin's thighs tensed.

His spread legs seemed to close in an instant, but then he seemed to remember I was there and stopped.

I watched his reaction as I moistened the glans with my tongue. Tilting my head slightly and using my tongue, Hamin’s glans soon became shiny with my saliva.

Was this enough?

I was ready. I had prepared myself mentally, so I opened my mouth wide.

“Hahp…”

Even though I only swallowed the glans, my mouth felt full. It even felt like my jaw was screaming at its limit.

It was still okay. If he asked me to take more, I’d really shake my head, but I hadn’t reached that limit yet.

With his c*ck in my mouth, I swallowed my saliva. The moment I felt something in my mouth, my tongue couldn’t stay still and began to lick the glans.

“Ugh…”

Hamin’s moans reached me. It seemed he couldn’t focus on his work at all. I was so focused on my task.

“Hmm, hah.”

A sound that could be called a nasal sound escaped. Maybe it was a nasal sound.

It felt fundamentally different from the sounds that naturally come from the throat, and it was oddly sharp yet soft, making me feel like I was acting cute.

I wondered how Hamin was feeling, so I glanced up, but all I could see was Hamin’s lower body or the underside of the desk supporting his upper body.

I glanced at the luxurious wooden ceiling but didn’t feel it was worth looking up, so I lowered my gaze.

His c*ck was in view. The large shaft I hadn’t swallowed yet came into sight. But since I couldn’t swallow that, I decided to focus on the glans, the erogenous zone.

As I licked the surface with my tongue, I leaned forward to help Hamin release the pent-up desire.

“Keh.”

“Kanna?”

“Sip, keh.”

Holding onto Hamin’s thighs tightly, I moved my head. The c*ck thrusting deep into my mouth made it hard to breathe, and my uvula was hit, making my eyes water, but it was okay.

At the sound of my coughing as if I was struggling, Hamin seemed worried and tried to stop me, but I didn’t give him the chance and kept moving my head diligently.

“Churp, mmm, kuh, keh.”

The sound of my tongue mixing with saliva. The nasal sound brushing past my nose. The painful m*an of the c*ck thrusting deep into my throat mixed with the sound of my breath being cut off.

All the sounds were coming from my mouth.

Hamin’s c*ck twitched. Since it was my first time doing this, I thought I might be clumsy, but as my jaw started to ache, I felt the c*ck swelling inside me as if it was bringing good news.

The feeling of expansion, the sensation of the pulse throbbing. The atmosphere of just before ej*culation, with the veins standing out,

descended.

It was a different sensation from having s*x with our bodies pressed together.

It wasn’t about knowing we were going together, but it was a position solely for serving the other person.

“Ka, Kanna… I think I’m going to…”

“Kuh?! Ugh, ugh…”

My eyes widened. I had mentally prepared myself, but when it came to actually taking it in my mouth, I realized the amount was more than I could handle.

I already had the glans in my mouth, and now I was supposed to take his semen in my mouth? Would it fit? No, probably not.

Instinctively realizing this, I moved the hand holding Hamin’s thigh to under my chin. And at the same time, I tensed my uvula to prevent it from flowing back.

“Gulp, gulp…”

Like a beating heart, the c*ck surged into my mouth, and I swallowed the semen it spurted. Some even overflowed and dripped down my chin.

I swallowed hard to prevent the chair from getting wet with semen, and to keep it from staining my clothes or Hamin’s pants.

It felt a bit off. The sticky sensation flowing down my throat didn’t feel particularly good. But I thought it was better to swallow it than to get dirty with semen, which would take a while to wash.

“Churp…”

To prevent any remaining semen from dripping, I licked the glans with my lips. Finally, I sucked the remaining semen in the urethra to prevent it from

wetting his underwear.

“Puh.”

Realizing it was over, Hamin pulled the chair back and swallowed his saliva.

I took the semen that had flowed onto my palm into my mouth, swallowed it, and then smiled at Hamin.

“…Thank you for the meal.”

Ch. 211 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 211

The secretary under the desk. At first, I wondered what it was, but without a moment to spare, Kanna's attack began immediately.

Since I didn't give her any work, she said she would do something else, and when I wondered what she was up to, it turned out to be fellatio.

I had never asked her to do it with her mouth, fearing she might find it dirty, but today, Kanna seemed different. It felt like a switch had been flipped.

Sitting on the edge of the chair with my legs slightly apart, Kanna came in a bit deeper and began to lick my shaft with her mouth.

She licked the underside of the glans with her tongue. At first, it felt ticklish, but as the stimulation increased, the ticklish sensation soon turned into a desperate longing.

I tried hard to hold back, but it was difficult to refuse Kanna's offer to do it for me. Eventually, after giving in, I found myself craving even more intense stimulation.

I deliberately held back, thinking that a baby might be growing inside her, but Kanna, oblivious to my thoughts, was busy flicking her tongue.

The increasingly intense stimulation made it impossible to resist. My shaft felt like a straw, and something inside seemed to be sucked out.

I needed to work, but with Kanna constantly stimulating me under the desk, my hands on the desk wandered aimlessly, unable to focus on the report in front of me.

My trembling hands eventually put down the report and clenched into fists. I couldn’t concentrate on work at all, and as the climax approached, my head stiffened, focusing solely on my lower body.

“Ka, Kanna… I think I’m going to…”

Before I could finish my sentence, the sensation of climax surged. It felt like my semen was about to burst and flow. Perhaps because I had held back for so long, it released much faster than I expected.

I tried to hold it in, but in the end, I couldn’t resist and came in Kanna’s mouth.

“Gulp?! Ugh, ugh…”

Kanna coughed as if she had swallowed water. I expected it to reflux and spill, making a mess, but contrary to my expectations, Kanna began to gulp it down.

A small m*an escaped. Since the desk was between us, I couldn’t see Kanna’s expression. Only the lewd sounds and the gulping noises could be heard.

Ironically, that stimulated my imagination, and I felt my shaft twitch.

“Ugh, uh…”

I hadn’t intended to make Kanna do this, but she swallowed the semen as if it was within her limits. Then, as if regretting the semen left on the glans, she licked it off with her lips and sucked it clean, even pressing her mouth to the tip of the glans to s*ck out the remaining semen from the urethra.

I would have been happy with anything Kanna did, but I was shocked that she went this far.

“Phew.”

With a breath of relief, I leaned back and looked at Kanna, who was licking the semen that had dripped onto her hand and smiling.

“I enjoyed it.”

Hearing that, I trembled. Since this was just foreplay, I started to feel the desire to touch Kanna’s chest and insert my shaft into her p*ssy.

But I shook my head, thinking of the baby again. I glanced at my now clean shaft, pulled up my underwear, and straightened my pants.

“Ka, Kanna, this… no, why all of a sudden?”

All that came out of my flustered mouth was this. I should have had this conversation earlier, but now it seemed like I was asking questions after having received everything.

Kanna didn’t point out the oddity of my timing and answered.

“…I wanted to help because Hamin seemed stressed.”

Kanna wiped the semen that had dripped onto her chin with her hand, sucked her finger, and pouted. She sat on the floor and glanced up at me.

“You looked tired because you weren’t giving me any work and were trying to do everything yourself. If you don’t give me work, I’ll keep doing this.”

“…What? No, originally, this is about construction or separate investigations, so there’s not much sitting work. It’s not really the kind of work Kanna should be doing…”

Kanna was asking me to give her work.

If there was work I could comfortably give her, I would have. But the world isn’t that easy.

We had to start construction to create an environment where humanity could live outside the walls. The reports related to this were numerous. It wasn’t just one ‘construction’ project.

And the investigations were the same.

When I tried to explain that it wasn’t possible, Kanna glared at me with sharp eyes.

“Then there’s no choice. Hamin has been sexually frustrated lately, hasn’t he?”

“…That’s something I can endure. It’s dirty to do it with the mouth.”

It was funny to say this after having received everything, but I repeated the same words I had said before and after Kanna did it.

Still, biting my shaft must have been a hardship.

Then Kanna sniffled. She frowned as if something was still stuck in her throat and swallowed something more. Finally, it seemed to go down, and she looked relieved.

“…Well, it’s Hamin’s.”

Kanna said that and turned her head sharply.

A slightly awkward atmosphere lingered.

“Thank you. But I still can’t give you work. Most of it is related to construction, so I need more time to study, and the investigations aren’t really something Kanna can do…”

It seemed like Kanna wanted to share my workload, but it wasn’t easy to do that. So, even after receiving Kanna’s bribe (?), I ended up saying something else.

Kanna pouted and glared at me, but nothing changed.

The next morning arrived.

She didn’t stop me from doing household chores, but she still seemed dissatisfied that I was taking on all the work.

It seemed like she wanted to share the work so that I could have more free time, but since I had just started taking on the work, there was nothing I could do.

It was the busiest time, so there was no choice.

Glancing at Kanna's expression, I headed out to the site, but Kanna remained seated without even saying, "Take care." She was sulking to the point of not making eye contact with me.

Groaning, I left, and when I returned, Kanna was waiting under the desk just like yesterday.

"Kanna… you don't have to do that. And I have work to do, right?"

Hold on. No matter how much Kanna tempts me, I'll endure it. As a father, now that I'm going to be a dad, I need to have patience…

"You say that, but the moment you see me here, you're already hard?"

The memory of yesterday with Kanna was so intense that the moment the keywords "Kanna" and "under the desk" came up, the sensations from yesterday came back, and I got an erection.

Kanna gently pulled me closer and carefully said,

"Hamin, do your work. I'll do my thing."

"Th-that's what you say, but…"

"Come on."

Kanna had been doing this every day as if to protest.

Without anyone telling her, without me asking, she took her place under the office desk and took my shaft into her mouth.

"Ugh, hmm… hup."

I wanted to do my work with Kanna between my legs, but that was only when the initial stimulation was mild. As Kanna's tongue began to lick the glans and move her head back and forth, my mind focused on one place.

I couldn't hold back. In the end, burying my head in the desk and trying to hold back the climax was all I could do.

"Grr…"

"Cough, huff, huff. Gulp."

When Kanna swallowed the saliva that came from keeping her mouth open, I felt a contraction and my body trembled. It felt like my lower back was going to give out.

"Ugh, Ka, Kanna…"

"Hmm."

When I desperately opened my mouth, Kanna laughed as if she understood, still holding my shaft in her mouth. Realizing I was about to climax, Kanna quickly placed her hand under her chin and began to s*ck hard, just like yesterday.

It's a part that everyone has, but it's definitely a bit awkward to put in the mouth.

As Kanna said, s*xual desire had built up. But since there was a baby, I could endure it. Even if it was 10 months, and even if postpartum care took over a year.

But Kanna was showing me that there was a substitute.

It's okay to do this, right? It makes you happy, right? Her voice, mixed with laughter, the cough as if something was stuck deep in her throat, and the sensation of her tongue in her mouth sent shivers down my spine.

Once again, the semen surged. As I tried to hold back the semen rising up the urethra, I couldn’t hold on any longer, and Kanna grabbed my shaft and swallowed the semen.

Just like yesterday, she didn’t forget to clean up, sucking and swallowing the semen.

“…Kanna, you don’t have to swallow it. You can spit it out.”

I felt so sorry that I said that, but Kanna didn’t seem to think so.

“If it gets dirty with semen, it’s hard to wash.”

“Are you going to keep doing this?”

“Yes, I’ll keep protesting here until Hamin gives me work.”

A sigh escaped. I wondered what to do. If this continued, I wouldn’t be able to work and would only think about Kanna’s fellatio.

“…Alright. I’ll give you the investigation work. Will that do? But if you see a monster, you have to run away immediately? Don’t fight, just tell me right away?”

I had to admit defeat to Kanna’s protest and give her work.

This way, I could make up for the work that had been delayed due to receiving fellatio yesterday and today.

It was unavoidable to feel uneasy and sorry about entrusting the investigation to Kanna, but since Kanna wanted it, I could do it.

“Yay! Finally, some work!”

“Do you like working that much?”

“Now Hamin can rest at home!”

Kanna said that and was excited under the desk.

What kind of situation is this? If it were an office with other people, this scene wouldn’t have been possible, but doing this outside of home felt strangely stimulating.

Still, it was a relief that I could focus on work again starting tomorrow.

The next day arrived. Kanna didn’t protest like yesterday since she had received work. I opened the door, tense from the construction site, but unlike before, Kanna was holding documents and checking her work.

While I was relieved, a sense of regret lingered.

“I’m back.”

“Yes, welcome back.”

The fellatio I received for two days kept swirling in my head. But it was just a momentary intense situation, and now it was time to focus on work again.

With the built-up s*xual desire somewhat relieved, I could focus better on work, which was good.

And so, the day passed. It was a return to routine.

As I prepared to face another day, I felt a sense of dissonance.

With the chirping of birds announcing the morning behind me, a heavy sensation in my lower body greeted me. I lifted the blanket slightly to see what was there, and Kanna, looking up at me from under the blanket, met my gaze.

“Phew, go, good morning.”

Ch. 212 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 212

The child has arrived. Her name is Stella Aurora.

Originally, it was natural for children and even wives to inherit surnames from their lineage, but due to Hamin’s unique naming style, I had no choice but to pass on my name here.

Of course, I could have passed on the surname Yoon.

But now that an organization has begun to investigate the truth, a name with a unique surname starting with Yoon was too conspicuous, so I had to make her inherit my surname.

It was a part that Hamin agreed with, hoping that Stella wouldn’t feel any burden in the future.

“She’ll grow up well.”

I whispered as I looked at the baby. The lovely baby that Orca had come to see once.

Her fingers were so tiny that it was adorably overwhelming to feel her trying to grasp my finger.

“Waaah, a.”

After a certain amount of time, she smiled brightly when she saw her mother’s face. Of course, she wasn’t completely quiet, but it seemed like she calmed down to some extent.

“She seemed to like when she saw her dad.”

When I glanced sideways at Hamin, he approached hesitantly.

Previously, he had kept his distance, perhaps because he was unfamiliar with the idea of being a dad, but this time, with a hopeful thought that maybe it would be different if I said something, he came closer.

Hamin placed his hand on the fence that was set up to prevent the child from falling and looked at the baby.

Her hair was starting to grow, and her clear eyes sparkled like jewels when she smiled. Looking at her black hair and violet eyes, it was easy to tell she was Hamin and my daughter.

“…Stella.”

“Abababababa.”

Hamin was worried that the baby might cry again, but that worry seemed unfounded as Stella was gleefully making high-pitched sounds.

Seeing that reaction, Hamin’s corner of his lips twitched. He felt joy just from not being rejected, but seeing his baby smile at him seemed to make him even happier.

“Did you see? She called me dad.”

Hamin gently brushed Stella’s cheek with his hand. Feeling the soft and tender touch, he nodded.

“She’s cute.”

“Right, super cute.”

We ended up gazing at the baby for quite a while without realizing how much time had passed. It was only when the baby started dozing off that I stepped outside.

When I came out to the living room, I turned my head to look around. After scanning the extremely spacious house once, I started counting the rooms with my fingers.

The master bedroom, and just in case, two rooms that we had built. One of them was for the baby, and the other was for clothes. There was one bathroom in the living room and another in the master bedroom, and the bath was separate…

It was spacious, but it was just a house with three rooms.

Still, since Hamin and I were sleeping together, I thought two children would be alright? That thought crossed my mind.

Of course, I wanted to have more children. But I wasn't really thinking like that. The sensation of giving birth still sent chills down my spine.

The pain of giving birth to Stella was indescribable. I still couldn't forget the tears and that sensation of the world turning yellow.

When I recalled the pain when I wanted to grab onto anything, the thought of having another child didn't even cross my mind first.

"What are you staring at?"

"Oh, it's nothing."

I had zoned out while counting the rooms, but came to my senses and shook my head.

"?"

When Hamin looked at me with a peculiar expression, I pouted at him.

"…I was thinking about names for the next baby."

"Next baby…?"

Hamin was dazed by my words, but as he gradually understood the meaning, his eyes widened.

“Kanna, you…!”

“No, no! I’m not pregnant! I was just thinking… you never know. The baby might feel lonely with nothing around… maybe a sibling… ah, I don’t know!”

I wanted to tell him it wasn’t what he thought, but every time I tried to say something, it felt like everything came out as an excuse.

This wasn’t what I intended.

My face turned hot as I ran away from the spot. Hamin, who had been suddenly pushed aside, blankly stood there for a moment before diligently chasing after me.

“Weren’t we supposed to be careful…?”

“I told you I’m not pregnant… I was just being a bit silly.”

Having run into the master bedroom, Hamin followed closely behind, making it no longer a refuge but a trap. With no place to escape, I turned my back on Hamin, covering my heated face with my hands as I dived onto the bed.

Ignoring my desire to escape, Hamin approached relentlessly.

“Shouldn’t you go to the hospital at least once? Checking at least once…”

“Really, it’s not that!”

They say it’s hard to tell in early pregnancy, so perhaps Hamin was worried about that, as he kept asking relentlessly.

I understood he was scared, having just had our first child and not knowing what to do, but even so, this felt excessive.

So I let out a screech in response to Hamin’s persistent questioning.

I didn’t forget to take the baby with me when I left for work. The baby might wake up at any moment and cry for her mother, needing her, so I had to stick close no matter what.

As I brought Stella to the office, Hamin opened his mouth in shock.

“…Shouldn’t you focus on parenting now?”

“Then who will work? Stella isn’t a newborn anymore, so it’s fine.”

Even so, she wasn’t old enough to manage things solo. I still needed to help with changing her clothes, and she was still quite unsteady on her feet, so I had to watch her carefully.

I still couldn’t forget how terrified I had been when she first stood up and walked on her own.

If there had been a daycare around, I would have been able to help her while sending her for studying, but this place was out in the open. Such a thing wouldn’t exist.

So I had no choice but to carry Stella everywhere I went. Moreover, since raising her wasn’t something I was doing alone, I couldn’t leave all the work to Hamin.

When I was tired, Hamin took care of Stella; when Hamin was feeling exhausted, it made sense for me to help out.

Though it’s said that keeping score in a marriage isn’t good, I thought discussing things like this could work out fine.

“…Alright, if you say so… Thank goodness there are baby supplies left in the office.”

Hamin rummaged through a box in the corner of the office. Inside were leftovers of diapers and formula. Although she could eat something else

besides formula, I wondered if formula would still be okay for a baby who was just learning to stand.

“I want to give her food, but it doesn’t come out anymore from mom’s breast…”

“…….”

Having been around the baby for too long, I felt like my speech started to resemble something baby-like when talking to Stella.

Hamin stared at me blankly. Of course, I was shocked and shut my mouth, but it wasn’t something to be embarrassed about since I was speaking to Stella.

Especially since it was Hamin.

While I might not discuss bodily matters with anyone else, I thought it would be okay to talk about it with Hamin. But contrary to my expectations, Hamin retreated cautiously, looking at me.

It seemed like he thought of something else, and realizing what it was, I glared at him with my eyes wide open while cradling the baby. I didn’t forget to grin at him.

“Our daughter must want some food too. What should we do?”

“Food?”

“Food~”

“Food!”

As I gently rocked Stella like a plane, Hamin let out a sound of discomfort.

“No, that’s…”

“Do you miss that taste?”

“No…”

When Stella was just born, milk had leaked out from my br*asts, almost as if to feed her. They say breast milk is quite good, so when it was meal time for the baby, I would let her nurse until she was satisfied and wait.

And perhaps Hamin, who was watching beside me, suddenly became curious and carefully asked.

‘…What does breast milk taste like?’

After confirming Stella had finished her meal, I offered the other breast.

Hamin waved his hands, saying that wasn’t what he meant, but how could I not know? There was no way he didn’t understand his own desire to taste the breast milk like Stella.

So I gently cradled Hamin’s head on my lap and let him nurse.

However, unlike back then, I wasn’t producing any more milk now. After giving birth, it only came out for a brief period, and by the time the baby should realistically be weaned, it would have dried up.

Whether it was for Stella’s food or Hamin’s snack.

“…But you did enjoy it, right?”

“No, um…”

Hamin wanted to deny it, but recalling that time made him shyly lower his head while only his face turned red.

After laying the baby down on the sofa, I quietly got up.

I undid the buttons of my jacket that drew clean lines over my body. When I let the button of my blouse slip, the fabric that had wrapped around me seemed to lose its strength, exposing my skin.

“…Ugh.”

Hamin gulped, trying to pull back. But sitting on the chair, it was an undeniable fact that he couldn’t escape far.

I pushed him against the wall and, still exposing my chest, whispered carefully.

“Even though the food Hamin likes doesn’t come out… do you want to try?”

Ch. 213 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 213

Hamin, who had paused his work for a moment, lay down straight on the sofa. Normally, he would rest his head on the armrest at either end of the sofa or use his own arm as a pillow if his neck hurt, but today he was resting his head on my lap.

Hamin seemed a bit awkward, wondering if it was okay to do this while the baby was on the opposite sofa, but the baby was sleeping soundly on the luxurious sofa, so why was he so worried?

He took off his jacket and unbuttoned his blouse. With his bra pulled up, exposing his bare chest, Hamin's gaze wavered as he rested on my lap.

It seemed that having the baby in his line of sight was making him uncomfortable. So, he eventually looked up, but then he ended up looking at my chest, making him even more awkward, unable to keep his eyes still.

I gently stroked Hamin's head with one hand and, with the other, moved my chest closer to his mouth.

"Come on, open up. It's time to eat."

"…No, that's… the baby is right here…"

"Would you have done it if the baby wasn't here?"

"……"

Hamin closed his mouth at my question. It seemed like a difficult question to answer.

“You need to rest properly. You’re always working, so I’m trying to give you some time to relax.”

So, I didn’t insist on getting an answer. Instead, I tried to ease Hamin’s nervousness by changing the subject.

If you think of the baby’s gaze as just another pair of eyes, it’s embarrassing, but since kids forget things easily, there’s nothing to worry about.

Forgetfulness aside, the baby probably doesn’t even understand what’s going on.

“How does it feel? Resting properly in the office?”

“It doesn’t feel like I’m resting properly.”

“Why?”

“Well, it’s just… too much, isn’t it?”

What exactly is “too much”? I went out of my way to create this situation so Hamin could lie down and rest.

Maybe lying down isn’t enough. Maybe he wants to sleep.

“So, do you want to sleep?”

“I’d rather sleep at home…”

“Then?”

Silence lingered. It seemed like he wanted to say something but couldn’t, so it seemed like he had something in mind.

I followed his gaze. Hamin’s eyes looked anxious, so I turned my head to find the cause.

I couldn’t tell if he had a lot of work. Printing documents was just a part of it, and most tasks were done on the computer.

Hmm, maybe he’s anxious because he has so much work that even resting feels stressful…

I felt a bit guilty for forcing him to lie down. So, I thought about tucking my chest back in and helping Hamin sit up, but something caught my eye, and I stopped.

“Oh… what’s this?”

I moved my legs nonchalantly. Hamin was a bit big to treat like a baby, but it wasn’t entirely impossible.

I gently held Hamin in my arms and brushed against his erection through his pants. The massive outline was clearly visible, and it was obvious he was hard.

“If Kanna does this in the office, I…”

“Do you like it?”

“……”

Hamin couldn’t say anything and just closed his mouth. He seemed to like it.

With practiced hands, I undid the button on Hamin’s pants. Once the button was undone, the zipper opened with just a slight touch.

As soon as I lifted his underwear, his large c*ck greeted me, the tip peeking out. Every time I saw it, I felt a strange emotion.

I swallowed hard and pushed my hand inside, naturally pulling out his c*ck. Hamin shuddered.

“Kanna…?”

“Stay still. Don’t wake the baby.”

“…Since the baby is here, it’s even more…”

Hamin fidgeted, trying to move away from me. Of course, since I had his c*ck in my hand, he couldn’t escape.

“…It’s cold, so can you warm it with your mouth?”

Hamin moaned at my words. His trembling eyes looked at me and then fell to my chest.

I thought he would just hesitate, but Hamin eventually listened and took my chest into his mouth. He closed his eyes tightly, seemingly embarrassed.

The baby was sleeping peacefully beside us, and here I was, exposing my chest, and he was sucking on it.

“Good.”

I smiled as if dealing with a child and moved my hand.

It was dry, so it felt rough as I moved. It was stiff and hard to move, so I had to struggle, but I hurried, thinking the baby might wake up wanting to eat.

I licked my hand with my tongue. I deliberately made it wet with saliva and then rubbed it on Hamin’s c*ck.

“Huh?”

“Shh.”

Hamin felt the sudden wetness and was taken aback, but I urged him not to make noise.

After all, I’m going to use my mouth, so this should be fine, right? It’s not like he’s going to complain about saliva now.

As I thought, Hamin didn’t say anything about me applying saliva. He was just momentarily surprised and stayed still with my chest in his mouth.

Well, it’s not like he looked as comfortable as a baby when he had my chest in his mouth.

Babies feel secure when they s*ck on a chest, but Hamin seemed anxious. Maybe it’s because the baby is here, so I thought about letting him s*ck on my breast when the baby isn’t around.

“How is it?”

“Mmm, mmm…”

I deliberately stroked from the base to the tip to make him feel satisfied. It was quite long, so it took a while to go from the root to the tip, but by compromising and stroking the middle part, I could satisfy Hamin.

Hamin’s face turned red. Along with that, I felt my face heating up too.

Hamin was sucking on my chest like a baby. No milk was coming out, but he was sucking hard. The feeling of my chest being sucked gave me a strange shiver.

Maybe it was because the air in the house and the office was different, or maybe the atmosphere played a part.

I calmed his trembling body and stroked his c*ck. I touched it, and sometimes I stimulated the tip with my thumb. Every time I did, Hamin’s c*ck twitched. Small moans escaped as a bonus.

Seeing Hamin m*an, it seemed like he was desperately holding back. Hamin usually shakes his hips roughly right before he cums.

I thought about shaking it hard with my hand to make him c*m, but I stopped.

When I completely stopped, Hamin opened his eyes wide and looked at me. He let go of my chest and moved his mouth blankly.

“…Huh, why?”

He seemed like he was about to c*m, but suddenly stopping left him unsure of what to do with the feeling. It was the expression of someone who had cooled down just before reaching climax.

Of course, I felt sorry. I wanted to see Hamin struggle. I wasn’t trying to be mean by saying, “Finish it yourself.”

It’s just.

“…Hamin, you have a lot, so your pants might get dirty.”

I helped Hamin sit up. The heavy sensation disappeared, and I felt lighter.

I knelt in front of Hamin. As I knelt gently in front of him on the sofa, I could see his c*ck twitching in my line of sight. The veins were bulging, as if it was desperately holding back.

“c*m here.”

I tapped the corner of his mouth and slightly opened it. Hamin swallowed nervously but didn’t grab my head or anything.

“Wait, just a moment…”

“Why? Is the baby bothering you?”

The baby doesn’t even know what this act is and won’t remember it anyway.

I thought that, but I understood Hamin’s feelings, so I had to move.

Not only did I stop right before he came, but I also moved before he could even put it in his mouth. It was an incredible display of patience.

Somehow, I moved back under the desk and smirked, teasing Hamin.

“Is that why you like being a secretary under the desk?”

“Ah, no…”

Hamin couldn’t continue. He was silently urging me to finish quickly. I smirked and swallowed Hamin’s c*ck with a “gulp.”

As always, just the tip filled my mouth.

I pulled my chin down and tried to swallow the c*ck coming into my mouth. It went deep, hitting the back of my throat, making my body twitch.

I gagged and trembled, but it was only for a moment. After repeating it a few times, I got used to it, and once I got used to it, I moved on to the next step, trying hard to swallow the c*ck in my throat.

“Oh, uh, Kanna…”

Hamin twitched in surprise. Unlike before, I wasn’t just squatting still and licking the front, so he was taken aback.

I leaned forward, resting my arms on Hamin’s thighs. Instinctively, I aligned my mouth and throat and slowly moved forward.

Naturally, the c*ck filled my throat.

I couldn’t breathe. I coughed roughly, but I could handle it to some extent.

Every time Hamin thrust deep, it was natural not to be able to breathe, and I was getting used to gagging when the c*ck hit the back of my throat.

Thud.

“?!”

“…Hah, I just came by for a bit. Oh, Kanna?”

I couldn’t exactly say, “I’m under the desk, halfway swallowing a c*ck,” so I froze.

Habar occasionally drops by unexpectedly, but it’s not frequent enough for me to remember that someone might come here.

Hamin pressed his body forward. He was trying to push me deeper under the desk to hide his lower body.

I hesitated and pulled back, taking the c*ck out of my throat and checking the situation.

“Ah, Habar’s here? Kanna went out for a bit to do some investigation.”

“…Huh, and left the baby?”

“She said it was a bit dangerous.”

“I see…”

Hamin desperately started answering to avoid suspicion from Habar.

Ch. 214 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 214

I stayed still and let out a deep sigh. If I suddenly jumped out from under the desk, that would be weird in its own way, so I had to stay here until Habar left.

In that case, there was only one thing left for me to do here.

I went back to sucking his c*ck. I took the head back into my mouth. I couldn’t go as wild as before, stuffing it all the way down my throat, but stimulating his sensitive spots was more than enough.

“Mmm, Habar.”

“Hm?”

“Do you know what the villagers are like?”

Hamin flinched, but as if trying to throw up a smokescreen, he kept talking, probably not wanting to reveal my presence here.

Meanwhile, I used my hand to give him even more stimulation.

“I don’t go often… since I don’t have my own place yet.”

“Oh? Ah, that’s too bad.”

“Why? Are you hurt somewhere?”

“N-No! Just tired from all the work.”

Listening to their conversation, I couldn’t help but think how desperate Hamin was, forcing himself to hold it together while talking.

Of course, I knew we couldn’t get caught, but in this situation, I just couldn’t stop.

“The baby’s cute. Sleeping so well.”

“…Right? Her name’s Stella.”

“Yoon Stella?”

“No, just Stella Aurora.”

“Ahh.”

I almost burst out laughing but barely held it in. Focus on the c*ck.

“Ah, Habar. Can you help me with something?”

“What?”

“Just need you to pass this along to the villagers. I’m just too tired…”

Hamin must’ve reached his limit because his legs started trembling slightly. Maybe realizing he’d give himself away if he came now, he chose to send Habar off.

Habar’s footsteps grew closer. The fact that he was just on the other side of this desk made my heart race.

Holding my pounding chest and muffling my sounds as much as possible, I moved my mouth.

“…Ugh, annoying. Fine.”

“Thanks. I was actually planning to build you your own house this time.”

“That’s good news. Is this it?”

“It’s included in there.”

“Oh…! Really?”

Habar said that and took a bundle of documents from Hamin. The sound of rustling papers followed, and soon, Habar’s footsteps faded away.

“I’ll deliver it and come back.”

“Yeah, mhm.”

Habar opened the door and slipped out, and I quickly moved my head in that brief moment.

“Kgh, hah, Kanna…!”

Hamin called my name in the quietest voice possible. Then, unable to hold back the rising climax any longer, he spilled his c*m.

Up to this point, it was just one of those occasional events. After he came, I’d s*ck his c*ck clean, swallow it all, and finish up. Hamin would pull his pants up, and I’d brush my teeth—end of story.

But as if the world refused to be that simple, the door suddenly swung open again.

Hamin jerked back in surprise, and at that moment, the c*ck still spurting c*m was yanked out of my mouth.

“!?”

“Why so shocked?”

Along with Habar’s voice, the world turned white before my eyes. The c*ck under the desk twitched like a tyrant, and the thick, milky-white fluid splattered across my face and body.

“N-No, I just got a work email all of a sudden…”

“I took the wrong one.”

“Ah, sorry. I’m out of it.”

“Nah, it’s fine. You said you’re tired—happens to me too. When I’m sleepy, I space out.”

Habar said that and soon walked away again.

I stared blankly at the twitching c*ck under the desk. Forget cleaning up—I was completely drenched in c*m, and it was beyond ridiculous.

“…….”

Clunk. The door closed. We waited like that for a while. Hamin must’ve been waiting for Habar to get far enough away.

How much time passed? The moment I thought Habar must’ve left the building, Hamin rolled his chair back and pulled away.

“Kanna…! Are you okay?!”

Covered head to toe in c*m, I mumbled incoherently. I had so much to say, but during that silent wait for Habar to leave, I forgot all of it.

Ah, what was I going to say again?

Frowning, I glared at Hamin. Seeing my sharp glare, Hamin started fidgeting, seemingly guilty about what he’d done.

“L-Look, you know it wasn’t on purpose, right? Habar suddenly opened the door again, and my body just reflexively jerked back…”

He seemed to want to explain himself but had no idea how to phrase it in a way I’d accept.

A warm sensation dominated my body. With c*m even dripping onto my exposed chest, the feeling was inevitable.

The sensation of having something in my mouth, something sliding down my throat, lingered faintly. It was a strange, indescribable feeling, like something intense still remained.

At a loss for words, I stayed still and let out a small m*an. If this were home, I might've retaliated, but this was the office, and there was a baby here—making a scene was out of the question, even for me.

"…Well."

"Sorry…"

No matter what I tried to say, Hamin was already in full repentance mode. The fact that he didn't say something like, *If you hadn't moved in that situation…* made me grateful, but something still felt unresolved.

I desperately tried to wipe the c*m off my hair and face.

Given the sticky nature of this liquid, rubbing it only seemed to spread it further, not remove it. But for now, this was the best I could do.

I couldn't fully clean the c*m from my hair. The lingering sensation of something wet—not water—on my face left me uncomfortable.

But what could I do? I'd just have to wash it off at home.

"It's fine."

"Sorry…"

"No, no. I'm the one who suddenly sped things up down there…"

Honestly, having his c*ck out, my chest exposed, and being in this atmosphere was torture in itself. I'd meant to enjoy it, but if I started

sulking over the unsatisfactory result, it’d only make things harder next time.

If that was the case, I needed *something* to lighten the mood.

That *something* didn’t need to be searched for far away. It was right here.

The one apologizing wasn’t entirely at fault—we were both equally to blame. And if we just brushed it off and moved on, the awkwardness would fade naturally.

Dwelling on the past would only cause problems, but letting it go wouldn’t.

“Still…”

“If you keep this up, I’ll do *this*.”

As I said that, I stretched out my hand. A current of electricity flowed from my fingertips, stimulating Hamin’s c*ck.

The c*ck, having sprayed c*m all over me and now resting contentedly, twitched and began to rise again.

“W-Wait, hold on…! You said ‘if I keep this up,’ but I haven’t even—!”

“Oh? Sorry. Already got you hard again.”

I inched closer.

Worried his pants might get stained with c*m, I slipped off my jacket, leaving only my white blouse, chest slightly exposed.

“Should we just do this much? I’m already a mess thanks to you, so it doesn’t matter.”

“‘A mess’… ugh.”

Hamin groaned before finally grabbing my arm and yanking me toward him.

“Habar won’t come back once he leaves… He won’t return today.”

Pulling me into an embrace, he said that.

Probably trying to say there’d be no more interruptions for the rest of the day. But why hug me like this?

The moment that question crossed my mind, Hamin hiked up my skirt, spreading my legs apart.

“H-Hamin…?”

“The baby’s asleep. Be quiet.”

H-Huh? Weren’t *you* the one panicking earlier…?

Hamin, his c*ck now fully erect from my ability, tried to push it between my thighs. With my skirt lifted and legs spread, his c*ck slid right in.

He pushed my panties aside and started thrusting.

“Hngk?!”

“Shh.”

Hamin said that and began moving slowly. My body was suddenly lifted, and before I knew it, I was laid back on the chair Hamin had been sitting on.

Though an office chair didn’t offer much space to lie down, as long as my shoulder blades had some support, it was fine. Hamin gripped my lower half and started rocking his hips.

“Hah, ngh, ah… nhh…”

Hamin suddenly started slamming into me like a man possessed. It hurt so much, like my stomach was being stabbed repeatedly. Tears welled up in my eyes.

The problem was that, aside from my saliva on his c*ck, there was no lubrication at all. The dry friction made each thrust painfully rough.

Covering my mouth with my hand, I barely held on. Seeing me struggle to suppress my moans seemed to excite Hamin, and he picked up the pace.

Since we were trying to keep quiet, there were no loud slapping sounds—just the wet squelching of his c*ck forcing its way inside.

“Ghk…”

My vision blurred. I’d only teased Hamin because it was fun, but I’d provoked him too much, and now he’d completely lost it.

His violent thrusts threatened to push me right off the chair.

With my lower half entirely dependent on Hamin’s grip, I wrapped my legs around his waist to keep from falling. Mistaking it for me acting coy, Hamin only fucked me harder.

His hands on my hips, he drove into me with even more force.

Honestly, does Hamin have some kind of office wear f*tish? Or a school uniform thing?

The thought crossed my mind briefly before vanishing—my brain had no room for distractions now.

“Hah, ngh, ah… nhh…”

The more he moved, the harder it was to keep my hand over my mouth. My moans, though muffled at first, soon became unmistakably loud.

The baby can’t wake up… Can’t let her see this… Habar can’t come back…

“Kanna, I’m coming…!”

Through my hazy consciousness, his voice pulled me back to reality.

“W-Wait, not inside again…! Ahn, haahh!”

As I screamed, Hamin gritted his teeth and sped up. Then, at the last moment, he pulled out.

His grip loosened, and my legs lost strength, releasing him. Naturally, my body slid to the floor.

Leaning slightly against the base of the chair, I sat there dazed as Hamin’s c*ck, still aimed at me, sprayed c*m across my body.

“Ugh… I told you not to come inside…”

“You said you were already a mess, right?”

Hamin reminded me.

Now that he mentioned it, I *had* said that… As that thought crossed my mind, I sank further into the stickiness of his c*m.

I never planned to go *this* far in the office.

Ch. 215 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 215

Somehow, I ended up having an extravagant experience in the office. I thought it would only stop at simulated s*xual acts in the office, but Hamin crossed that line, thinking it might be okay.

Since I wasn’t pregnant, there was no ban on s*x, and the baby was sleeping well. I also knew that Habar wouldn’t be coming back.

In that moment, there was nothing to stop Hamin, who realized that there was nothing hindering him.

He had been enduring patiently due to the baby, but it was none other than me who released him.

Having gone too far, I couldn’t do anything and leaned back in the chair, while I ended up being covered in Hamin’s warm semen as I trembled on the floor.

I thought I shouldn’t get my clothes dirty, that it would be hard to wash if it got on the chair. Remembering the way I performed fellatio while saying such things made me feel like I was being used as a receptacle for semen.

I had talked about such things when it was in my mouth, but I never expected him to dump it over my head and body like this.

“…Ugh.”

Should I be thankful that I took off my jacket? A sticky white fluid was dripping down my pure white blouse. The areas where it flowed were visibly dark due to getting soaked.

I imagined others would be horrified if they saw this.

The strong smell of semen wafted through the air, making my brows furrow instinctively, yet Hamin, even after that, was gripping his p*nis and shaking his hand.

I couldn’t help but admire the way his hand moved as if he was trying to extract every last bit left in his urethra.

The last drop of semen that fell onto my nose struck me intensely with its odor.

Finally regaining my composure, I looked at Hamin sitting on the floor.

Of course, it was I who first dangerously approached the line. I was the cause of it, too. So I had nothing to say. I shouldn’t have anything to say.

But why did we need to engage in such a filthy act in the office?

Before marriage, I might have pretended to consider using a condom, but after getting married, it seemed natural not to use one, even going so far as to spray inside me when there were no plans for a second child.

“What do I do now?”

“…Hold me.”

“…You know that’s impossible.”

Hamin distanced himself with a disgusted expression. I was almost annoyed that he was trying to pull away after making me like this.

Hamin, who was out of reach despite my outstretched hand, made a puzzled expression and then suddenly had a glimmer of a good idea.

“How about I just go home and wash up today?”

“…Go home? In this state? What if monsters come around with this stinky smell!”

“Ah, that won’t do…”

As I whined like a spoiled child, Hamin groaned and looked at me cautiously.

Monsters could be handled, but the issue wasn’t how to handle them; it was about drawing the monsters’ activity area close to us.

Thus, Hamin couldn’t help but look troubled at the very mention of monsters.

“Then I’ll go back with you… I should take the baby, too.”

“If we run into someone on the way back, I’ll have to say it’s all my husband’s.”

In any case, there was no one besides Hamin who would do this to my body.

As I wrapped myself in my jacket, Hamin gave a dry laugh at my joke, hạ hạ, hạ hạ. It was likely a socially problematic sight whether or not I spoke.

My hair stuck together because of the semen. My blouse was oddly damp, and with the jacket covering it, the smell was peculiar.

If someone got close, I was sure I would furrow my brows due to the distinct fishy odor.

Of course, the ‘someone’ would be quite limited.

As I stood up, struggling to keep my balance, Hamin approached me in shock.

“I’ll help you.”

While it was quite kind of him to offer to support me in such a messy state, it really wasn’t that difficult. I wasn’t so in need of help as if I were a newborn deer, so I waved him off.

“No, Stella, hold me. I’m in this state right now…”

“…Alright.”

Hamin seemed to be concerned about me, but there was no helping it since he had also brought Stella along.

I made my way home, receiving Hamin’s worried glances as I stumbled. As soon as I entered, I dashed to the changing room, undressed, and stepped into the bathroom, turning on the water.

While listening to the sound of the water pouring, I took a moment to gather myself before starting my shower, working hard to wash away Hamin’s scent from my body.

As I struggled to wash my hair, Hamin must have been worried because he peeked in and spoke.

“Kanna.”

“…Oh, yeah? What is it?”

Since my head was thoroughly soaked, water was dripping down my face. I wiped the water away and turned my head toward the voice, where I saw Hamin wearing only shorts.

“…Why are you just in shorts?”

“Just thought I’d help you wash your hair.”

“Really?”

Were my bodily fluids that concerning to him? Usually, it wouldn’t have mattered. But now, since it felt quite helpful, I gently passed him the showerhead.

“Is the baby sleeping well?”

“Yeah, he fell asleep after eating a bit.”

Hamin took the showerhead and began sprinkling water on my hair. The pleasantly warm water soaked my hair and flowed down my body.

Was it such a nice thing to have someone take care of my hair? I knew it was convenient to have tidy hair just by sitting still, but the sensation of my scalp being massaged and my hair being caressed felt undoubtedly good.

A sleepy sensation washed over me.

I accepted that feeling blankly and exhaled a trembling breath.

“How is it? Should I apply conditioner?”

“Uh-huh.”

Even after rinsing my hair once, Hamin, showing no sign of annoyance, continued on to the next step. My hair felt increasingly softer. Just when I was enjoying its silky texture, Hamin swept my hair aside and then moved his hand to touch my body.

When he pressed on my soft flesh, my eyes widened.

“…Why?”

“I just thought we could do a little today. It’s been ages since we’ve done anything.”

Hamin was appealing to release what he had been holding back all this time.

I thought I had been satisfying a part of Hamin’s s*xual desire even without actual s*x, but perhaps that wasn’t the case.

“We just did it in the office earlier…?”

“That was because it was the office, so I restrained myself…”

“Wait, hold on, that was restraint?”

“Well, you can’t get that intense while the baby is sleeping outside.”

My eyes shook.

That was considered not intense? He had me half-lying on the chair while he thrust into me, didn’t he? The chair was creaking, wasn’t it?

As various thoughts coursed through my mind, Hamin’s hands didn’t stop touching my chest. Then, he pinched my left n*pple with his index and thumb, which he had asked about earlier.

“Ow…”

“The baby is sleeping in the other room, so you can cry without worry.”

“That’s not… ugh.”

Saying that, Hamin pressed himself against my body. He hugged me tightly as if he didn’t mind that his shorts were getting wet and thoroughly explored my body.

He caressed outside and then pushed deep inside. It seemed he was planning to tease me again, even though we had just done it earlier. Of course, I wasn’t asking for it right now, but the anticipation of warming up was even more intimidating.

“Eek, ah, ugh.”

To be able to scream as much as I wanted. Was he out of his mind…?

I thought that, but my body was already heating up. It seemed Hamin came with the intent to ignite that fire and threw off his pants, covering me once more.

Just like Hamin said, the bathroom was filled with cries that resembled my screams.

“…I thought I was going to d*e. Look at my hoarse voice.”

As I rubbed my throat, Hamin chuckled beside me.

If I had a neighbor, they might have suspected there was domestic violence going on next door from all the craziness. Tears welled up in my eyes, I struggled to breathe, and my whole body was soaked with warm water, causing my temperature to rise.

It was a moment of complete disarray. Today made it clear what happened when Hamin activated his switch.

I should be thankful that Stella’s room was quite far from the bathroom. It was amazing that despite all the noise I made, she didn’t wake up.

“Did Kanna’s skin get a bit better?”

“…Just a little wouldn’t improve my skin. If you say something weird, I’ll scold you.”

“How so?”

Hamin playfully asked, as if he knew exactly what I would say. He wore an expression that suggested he wouldn’t come out on the losing end.

Something about him was annoying, and I felt like punching him.

But I also had my own secret weapon.

“We’re going to have separate rooms.”

“Whoa!!”

Hamin’s eyes went wide, and he looked at me in shock upon hearing my secret weapon. Since I usually teased him, he must have thought this was comeuppance, but I knew my fair share of ways to hit back.

“Kanna, I’m sorry… Was it really hard?”

“Hmm, my shoulders hurt. Almost on the bathroom floor earlier…”

“I’ll massage you right away.”

Hamin fumbled to start massaging my shoulders with his hands. The tension that had built up in my shoulders began to ease, causing me to relax completely.

“Ah, that feels good.”

I closed my eyes tightly and let out a deep sigh.

Ch. 216 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 216

Outside was filled with unrefined magical power. From a distance, it might have been seen as high-quality magic, but it mostly had adverse effects on the body.

So people spoke in unison.

“It’s dangerous outside the walls.”

But that was an old saying now. After much research and effort to allow people to venture outside, an environment suitable for them to do so was somewhat established.

This was completed in the year Stella was to enter middle school.

For those who adapted slowly or were sensitive, this was still out of reach, but even so, it was quite an achievement that more people had begun to come out.

Stella, Luna, Nox, Iris, Selin, and Io…

“Stop, stop…! Mom, please stop…!!”

Stella, who had rushed out since the morning, stood before me almost in tears.

I was taken aback by my daughter’s sudden outburst and rolled my eyes, unsure of how to react.

Watching my husband at the table having breakfast with the kids, all I received back was a blank stare as if he knew nothing.

“Why is she acting like that?”

Nox started, and Luna tilted her head in confusion.

Iris and Selin seemed unconcerned with their sister’s reaction, too busy playing next to their dad.

In the end, no one knew why Stella was acting like that, which meant I had no choice but to ask directly.

“What happened this morning…?”

“She, she does it too often…! I’m fourteen now…! I know everything, but isn’t it too defenseless…?”

My husband, who was drinking water, sprayed it out at Stella’s wail.

I was left speechless at her brief but intense cry that could not be ignored. Still, I was relieved that he was able to navigate his words thoughtfully, considering the siblings.

Meanwhile, Nox came up to me, looking at his sister.

“What does she do often? I want to do it too.”

No, not yet.

I wanted to say that, but the words wouldn’t come out.

The innocent child who knew nothing was now nowhere to be seen. As Stella began to learn about the world, moving between the inside and outside of the walls, more things began to come into view.

It was said that knowledge increases the resolution of life. The face of my daughter, who had now figured out what Mom and Dad were doing in their room, turned bright red.

“…Well, you see.”

“I don’t want to hear it! I don’t want to hear it. This is already the sixth time. I feel like I’m going to lose my mind. I’m going to stay at a dorm once I start middle school. Dad knows that too!!”

Bam! Stella said her piece and rushed back into her room.

Left with no words, I turned to my husband in disbelief. As he wiped away the spilled water with a cloth, he glanced around, pulling out a meager excuse.

“…I guess puberty has hit. She’s at that age, right…?”

“Ha…”

With a sigh escaping me, I found myself at a loss for words and lowered my head.

It seemed that rather than worrying about outside, soundproofing in the house should take precedence. In breaking the family’s peace, what did the world have to say?

“Be careful.”

“Okay.”

When I said this softly, my husband seemed to bow his head, indicating he had no words left.

When I arrived at the office, Habar welcomed me.

“Want a cup of coffee?”

Time had passed, and she had matured and become more relaxed. She was already there, preparing coffee.

Though it was meant for others, Habar consumed twice as much herself. It was one of the main reasons the snacks in the pantry vanished. Even if she

was being paid, she preferred the snacks from the pantry.

At least she was taking her allowance home, which was a relief.

“Sure, I’ll take a cup.”

“Oh, by the way, I received a call earlier.”

“A call?”

“Yeah, they said if you mention Orca, they’ll know.”

“Ah…”

Now that I thought about it, it seemed like it was time to meet.

Inside and outside the walls, a project aimed at breaking down the boundaries was underway. Gradually, people were able to come out, and there began to be talents who could bring heavy machinery out to build structures, so development was quickly accelerating.

“Then we need to get ready… Can you stop by home and check on the kids?”

“…That’s fine, but how many?”

“Five.”

Habar pursed her lips.

“Isn’t one of them already grown up?”

“Counting the baby from the maternity ward, there are five… Could you not make that face?”

“Then there are six kids total…?”

When I nodded, Habar made a groaning sound.

But she didn’t refuse. With her shoulders slumped, she headed towards my home.

It was often better for Habar to not be around when discussing work with Orca. It’s because she liked simplistic methods, which made it hard to come up with proper ideas.

I just had to ensure it wasn’t boring for her, but now, seeing her expression that she was tired of babysitting made me worry that the fun was turning into work.

If she didn’t like it, I could either assign it to someone else or quit, but…

“That can’t happen.”

Since I was greatly contributing to the efforts for people to come outside, taking a break for childcare wasn’t an option. Though there were many kids, the exhaustion of parenting was manageable, and thankfully, I could push through household tasks with money.

If I had also been short on cash during this time, I probably would have been tasting hell.

When the clock struck ten, I heard a tapping sound.

“Come in.”

“It’s me. Orca Lamiris.”

“…Hi? Oh, welcome.”

I was just a simple woman, but Orca gave off an air of sophistication, being from a well-off family.

What do they call this? A certain weight? Classic?

Whichever it was, there was an overwhelming aura emanating from her. The sharp atmosphere made me think she would have been nicknamed Viper if she had been a teacher.

“Why are you acting so burdened? I just came here for work.”

She kept work and personal life strictly separate. It was completely different from my blurred lines, making me uneasy as Orca threw playful words my way.

“Where’s Habar? That girl who said making coffee was her job.”

“Oh, she went home to take care of the kids. She’s doing fine on her own now.”

“…How many kids did you say?”

As she fidgeted with her fingers, she held out both hands.

“Six!? Now that you mention it, your stomach did get a bit thinner. I should come by more often. It gets hard to visit outside the walls, but ah…”

With a furrowed brow, Orca sighed.

“Well, it just turned out that way…”

“Come on, don’t make excuses. It’s probably due to your randy husband.”

“It’s not just that…”

As she squirmed in her seat, Orca let out a hollow laugh.

“From my perspective, you’re both the same.”

“I’m trying to restrain myself… By the way, Orca, didn’t you also have a kid? How old did you say?”

“…Seven.”

“Then, Selin will start elementary school with her!”

“Oh my god. Selin is the fifth child, right? Seeing it like this, it feels strange. My eldest and your fifth are the same age, so isn’t that odd?”

Oh, is that so?

I intentionally brought up the subject of school to shift the conversation, but instead, I was met with a look of disbelief from Orca.

That wasn’t what I was trying to do.

“Shall we talk about the project…? There has been quite a bit of progress. How about another cup of coffee?”

“…Don’t give me what you were drinking; give me something else.”

“Of course, I’ll brew a fresh one.”

I smiled and handed her a paper cup.

Sipping a warm gulp of coffee, I rummaged through my bag. What I pulled out was a stack of documents.

[Investigation and Research of Outside the Walls], [Study on Acceptable Levels of Semi-Purified Magic], [Singularity of Kanna Aurora]

“Oh, there’s a document I haven’t seen…?”

“It’s nothing much. The researchers quickly added a paper saying you’re working on purifying magic from outside little by little.”

“I don’t remember receiving anything regarding that study… Ah, I suppose I might not have received anything at all.”

“…They probably drafted the theory based on what they’ve heard, since it’s a bit awkward to come out.”

Fifteen years since I came out of the walls.

I had been utilizing my electric magic to purify the magical power from outside. Though it still needed fine-tuning, now it was possible to purify even larger quantities with the help of machinery.

Those kinds of aspirations came together and achieved decent results.

“Is this for me?”

“Yeah, I brought a copy. For now, let’s review it together here. If you have anything to say separately, send me a message.”

“You’re definitely giving off some lady-like vibes.”

The aura I felt made it clear—she had the presence of a refined lady.

“I’m not old enough to be called a lady yet!”

“Oh, no! It’s just that you and I are the same age. I just couldn’t think of the right words!”

Orca flared up, causing me to instinctively shrink back. As she placed her hand on the armrest of the sofa, she clicked her tongue and sat back down.

“I feel like I’ve become more foolish since coming here. I wonder why that is. Aren’t you busy having kids and living in a flurry? Can’t you hold back a little? The kids at home are all growing up, so what on earth…”

“……Yeah.”

“What kind of response is that?”

Before leaving this morning, the very fresh topic made my face turn red.

No matter how often it was indeed real and how open I was about it, discussing such matters in front of others naturally brings embarrassment. I fanned my heated face with my hand to cool it off a bit.

“Well, you see…”

As I recounted what happened earlier that morning, Orca rubbed her temples.

“Please don’t do that.”

“Hamin suggested it…”

“Aaaah! I didn’t hear that, I didn’t! Why do I have to hear about other people’s married lives?!”

Orca covered her ears and shouted loudly to drown out my words. I pouted, glancing around as I put my hands on the project.

“Just focus on raising them from now on.”

“…You said you didn’t want to hear it, right?”

“When you see a working kid’s belly swell and shrink repeatedly, whether you like it or not, you just learn about it. You can’t expect me to just not know.”

Is that how it is…

“Got it. I’ll try to keep it in mind. Anyway, do you want to look at this?”

“What is it?”

After a brief chat, the topic quickly shifted back to work, and Orca’s expression changed instantly. It felt like the usual her.

Perhaps since we were headed in the same direction, even though time had passed, I couldn’t help but think we were still the same.

Ch. 217 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 217

In the past, people lived here. But unable to cope with that, they ultimately fled inside the wall, leaving only nature outside.

There are traces left by people, but it didn’t take long for everything to collapse and become one with nature. Weeds filled the ground, and plants climbed the structures, using them as support.

In that scenery, one by one, people began to increase.

They pushed the ground again and filled the floor with bricks or asphalt. Despite trying not to damage the surroundings excessively, construction continued for years to create an environment where people could live.

By the time the sound of hammering became familiar to my ears, a neighborhood was created. Though still small, I thought it would grow larger as more people came, making it hard to find anything more rewarding than this.

Protecting nature is good, but since people can’t live only inside the wall, eventually, they would need to develop it.

I too, perhaps because I am a person, feel my heart swell every time it develops into a place where people live.

The barrier collapse project.

It was a term that would have horrified people from the old days, but there was a sense of frustration in the walls that used to protect people. Now, it contained a desire to go out into a wider world.

The nature beyond the reach of people’s footsteps is rich with resources, and there were landscapes that the people inside the wall could hardly see.

A single terrain, a consistent climate. It’s certainly a good thing to be able to venture into a broader world apart from those.

I must work hard for several more years to achieve that.

Crackle, crackle.

Sparks flew from my head. When I sparked this machine that I designed with Orca, it radiated the same electric current around it.

The current imbued with magical power breaks down toxins in the air and makes them harmless to the human body. As I did this often, the surrounding area became tolerable to a degree.

I couldn’t neglect the task of finding and removing toxin-producing plants.

“Ah.”

I held my head.

It was dizzying since I was using magical power.

But now that I had six kids, I decided to restrain my enthusiasm. Having created miracles with the increasing number of people by replenishing my magical power, it was time to take a break.

Having even given birth to Io, I really can’t do this anymore…

No matter how much the country doesn’t skimp on support to go outside the wall, I can’t just spend all my child-rearing costs on that.

Even though the money Hamin and I earn is considerable, if the children feel poverty while living, it’s inevitable that I, who gave birth to six, will become an object of resentment.

I’m still not strong enough to bear resentment from my own child.

I’m not that strong.

“Ahhh… I should get off work…”

After stretching and yawning, I really felt that evening was approaching.

I need to go grocery shopping, there’s so much to do. I wouldn’t be surprised if I were found dead by now if Habar hadn’t been watching the kids.

It’s amazing how such a connection has continued.

Whatever it is, I must cook something delicious today.

It’s only natural to reward a child who doesn’t expect any money with this much.

**

The third child, Nox, had a headache again today.

One son and five daughters. Excluding his working dad and mom, there was only one boy left alone.

He has two older sisters and three younger sisters. Since there’s no preference for boys here, Nox’s status was just awkward.

Excluding Io, who is still too young to speak, he should be able to communicate to some extent, but his sisters block their ears and his younger sisters do not listen.

For some reason, since this morning, the eldest sister Stella has been yelling at their mom and went into her room, while the second sister Luna keeps asking what’s pretty.

“…They’re all the same.”

“What? What’s the same? Look again. This one is a bright red and this one is a vibrant red!”

“They’re all the same red… Oh, this. This one.”

“Don’t just pick randomly because it’s annoying, look again.”

Stella, who is about to enter middle school, claims she can manage just fine, but Luna and the others are still in elementary school.

So, the conversation style resembling a tantrum was busy taking over Nox’s mind.

“Oppa! Oppa! I want to be a princess. A princess.”

“…Uh, be a princess. A princess…”

“I want to wear a dress. A princess wears a dress.”

Selin, who is just about to start elementary school, giggled as she imagined herself.

Iris, who was watching from the side, shook her head.

“I want to play with dolls…”

She pouted, tightly clutching the teddy bear she was holding.

Nox, who was half enlightened and still playing with them, was always popular. Stella, who had locked herself in her room during puberty, or Luna, who was busy grooming her looks, could not help him.

“Ha, Habar noona.”

Nox searched for Habar, who came to help with the housework, but Habar was only yawning and watching Io.

“…I’m overwhelmed with just this one.”

“I’m overwhelmed with two. Can’t I look after Io?”

“This one is mine.”

“…….”

Is it right to say it’s mine?

I questioned it inwardly but had nothing else to say. As long as I take good care of them, it’s all good.

The problem was that the range of care was too narrow.

In the end, Nox was left taking care of the two.

Being in a position where he has to play princess and play with dolls was complex and troublesome for Nox.

“Well, then Selin can be the princess, and the dolls can be the subordinates. Then it’ll feel like soldiers and be fun, right? …Princess…! How do you do?”

Holding another doll and trying to match Iris and Selin’s whims, he changed his voice. As long as he entertained them to a certain degree, they’d become satisfied and get lost in their own worlds.

Selin, who wanted to play princess, smiled wide.

But Iris, holding the teddy bear, did not look too pleased.

“My teddy bear is a princess…”

‘Ah.’

Nox was on the brink of losing his mind, but he couldn’t lose it. He needed to soothe his younger sister and escape the situation immediately.

If someone could help, then only one person could take care of them, but it was a relentlessly exhausting life with just one body.

After finally calming the two, Nox sighed deeply and returned to his room.

“I like robots.”

He pouted.

The problem was that there wasn’t a single person here who liked robots.

Robots, card games, playing with tops. There were toys, but there were no kids to play with except at school. When vacation season hit, even going inside the wall was difficult, making these lonely days feel burdensome.

He rummaged through his basket and pulled out the tops inside. Then he took out the robot, gripping it and pushing, pushing. He made sounds with his mouth while moving its arms and legs.

As soon as he started moving it around in cool poses, he lost interest and began repeatedly slamming the tops he had scattered on the floor.

At least he could flip them over himself, which was a fortunate part. Playing alone wasn’t that enjoyable, but it wasn’t entirely boring.

“Ah, I want to go to school…”

“Hey, Nox! Didn’t I tell you not to put your stuff in my clothes basket?”

“Uh-oh.”

At Stella’s shout, Nox froze.

Being four years younger than her, it was unavoidable that she was a bit terrifying.

Moreover, he had broken a rule that she repeatedly told him not to, so this was not going to end well.

“Well, um, so…”

“Do you think I’m funny?”

“Uahhh!!”

Stella charged at Nox, who was sitting on the floor, and immediately applied a technique on him.

It was said that girls were stronger than boys when they were young, and Nox was subdued on the ground, with his arm twisted behind him.

“Ugh, sorry, I’m sorry!”

“You’re dead! You keep putting things in my clothes basket; do you have a brain or not?”

“Cough, cough. Tap, tap!”

“Stop talking nonsense!”

Once Stella vented her anger, she huffed and left the room.

Nox, feeling the limpness of his arm, clutched his shoulder and lamented his situation.

With only sisters above and below, it was inevitable that his energy was drained. In the meantime, the second one came in and showed off her necklace picture.

“How about this one? This one? Look at the color.”

“…The big sister just left.”

“Do you know that you’ll d*e if you provoke her when she’s angry? Even if there’s just a one-year age difference, there are things that shouldn’t be done. But are you resisting?”

“No, it’s not that.”

“What color is pretty? No, what shape? Hearts are pretty, but I think something fits better with the moon… Hmm, yellow might not go well. Purple too…”

Ah, please.

Fourteen and thirteen. With both sisters running around like this, it was driving him to the brink of frustration.

However, ten-year-old Nox had no means to resist.

“Aren’t you going to play with your younger siblings?”

“They like playing with toys more. But why do you keep dodging my questions?”

“Purple, I like purple.”

“Stop just dawdling!”

Nox hated the vacation.

As night fell, while mom and dad were on their way home, Irina and Selin ran out to hug Hamin. A somewhat exhausted Nox trudged along behind them.

Faced with Hamin’s majesty, who hugged both daughters at once, Nox stood there blankly and bowed his head.

“Welcome back.”

“Yeah.”

Looking pleased, Hamin warmly accepted his son’s greeting while Kanna, who followed, reached out toward Nox.

“Son~”

“Uh, mom.”

Though harassed by girls all day, he was the only son who found healing from his mom.

“Oh my, why are you so clingy? Was it tough?”

Kanna smiled wryly at Nox, who was clinging to her tightly, and patted his back.

“I brought chicken, shall we eat?”

“Yes.”

Rustling sounds.

“Oh, chicken. Chicken chicken. Sister, it’s chicken! If you don’t eat it, I’ll eat it all!”

Luna, who came running leisurely from behind, shouted, and Stella quickly followed.

In an instant, the entrance became noisy.

Ch. 218 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 218

A noisy day. When vacation time comes, children stay at home all day, making the house and rooms noisy.

They research to allow people to come out of the walls. They may be here under that pretext, but it wasn’t a very good space for the kids.

It doesn’t matter for us since we can drive around in a car, but the kids can’t drive, so they wouldn’t like the town outside the walls where there aren’t many people.

There’s nothing to enjoy nearby, and since there are no friends living close by, there’s nothing to do except play with their siblings at home.

Knowing that situation well, I deliberately buy them many toys, but often end up feeling that it’s still not enough.

While Irina and Selin can be played with by their dad Hamin, Stella seems to enjoy her alone time since she’s hit puberty, and Luna is so focused on dressing herself that Nox, who’s left alone, has nothing to do.

He probably wants to run around but can’t, and you can see the disappointment in his eyes. Playing by himself with a robot toy must be incredibly boring.

It’s not easy to ask to do something with the only man around being their dad. Whether it’s soccer or basketball, it’s not that simple.

He must feel like he’d rather run around desperately with friends than perform for his dad, yet he can’t do that, often stuck in frustrating daily

routines.

With an elder sister and a younger sister, I felt like I could understand, even as someone who works outside, that being sandwiched between them could be exhausting.

Maybe he’s the one who hates vacation the most… that’s my thought.

“So, wouldn’t it be good to buy something?”

So, when we stopped by the market inside the walls, I decided to buy a gift for Nox.

“What are you going to buy?”

“What if dad doesn’t understand his son’s feelings?”

“…I’ve been too busy to pay attention. How about this?”

“Blocks?”

It’s priced a bit high, but it’s a fun toy to assemble.

The problem is that it eventually becomes a decorative piece after it’s made.

“One or two should be fine, but if it keeps increasing, won’t there be nowhere to put them…?”

“That’s true, but one should be okay.”

“Right, it must be tough for Nox too being sandwiched between them. He should at least have something comforting.”

If he didn’t have even that, he’d be suffocated by the girls above and below him, and I had to make sure to prepare something else for him to not get warped by it.

And it should be something that wouldn’t be an eyesore to his siblings.

If I get one thing wrong, the eldest will ask for more pocket money, the second will want a necklace, and the fourth will want a doll while the fifth will bug me for a princess set with a dress.

With so many kids, even buying a single toy results in enormous expenses.

“I guess there are just too many kids.”

“…It can’t be helped.”

“Stella seems to be annoyed by our noise too…”

“That’s something we need to moderate.”

“It can’t be helped.”

I let out a deep sigh.

In the beginning, driven by greed, I was busily emitting magical power, hoping people could come out of the walls a bit faster.

After exhausting all my magical power, I would receive more from Hamin and squander it again.

Repeating that process naturally led to having kids.

Having two in consecutive years, I thought I needed to be careful with that, and then the fourth and fifth were also born in consecutive years… it was definitely excessive. Looking back now, there was never a hotter time than that.

The idea of yearly births was enough to make others gasp.

“There’s no goalposts for soccer or basketball, and for table tennis, the opponent is just dad… what else could be good?”

“How about this? Catch ball.”

Hamin grabbed a glove.

Baseball requires even more gear than soccer, so I hadn’t even considered it. You need to form a team, buy gloves, and a bat. I felt like countless tools were necessary, so I skipped it, but why didn’t I think of catch ball?

“That’s a good idea!”

A pair of gloves and one ball should be enough to have fun.

Other kids might not enjoy it, but if either Hamin or I take turns playing with him, it could still be enjoyable, right?

“Then shall we buy this?”

“Yeah, that sounds good.”

I hope Nox likes it.

But then, if I only buy for Nox, the others will strongly oppose it; I wonder if giving too much might also become a problem…

“Let’s buy the toys later. This time, we’ll just buy the gloves.”

“…Is that so?”

“Are you perhaps wanting to try it out for yourself…?”

“No, it’s not that. I was only thinking of helping Nox since it’s his first time. I just briefly thought about it, that’s all.”

Hamin returned the block box he had put in the cart to its place.

Even though he’s a grown man, he was thinking about getting a toy to give to Nox, wanting to match.

I hope Nox is fortunate enough to not match all the pieces when he puts one together.

“Oh dear.”

“Kanna, that’s not it.”

“Oh dear, oh dear.”

“I’m saying it’s not…”

With an expression that seemed to lack the strength to respond, he pouted and shook his head. Hamin, with his shoulders drooping, placed the glove in the cart.

“With so many kids, it’s nerve-wracking to take care of Nox. This… this. Dad needs to earn more money!”

He placed his hand on the cart and gazed intently at the gloves inside.

Since their preferences are different, it doesn’t make sense to buy uniformly. The boys are simple, content with just one ball, but the girls have such differing interests that it complicates things.

“How did it end up being that I only gave birth to girls, making it difficult to match…?”

A smile escaped at Hamin’s question.

“I saw somewhere that it’s the dad’s role to determine the s*x of the child. Maybe you wanted to have daughters.”

“…What I saw somewhere indicated that it changes depending on whether you ate more meat or vegetables during pregnancy.”

“That’s totally a superstition, isn’t it?”

“Either way, it’s the same as what I saw somewhere.”

“Childish.”

As I chuckled, Hamin held a bittersweet smile amidst his expression.

“Should we buy a doll too?”

“If we do, then we’ll need to buy a princess set as well.”

“Why don’t we just buy one of everything while we’re at it?”

“Looks like we need to earn a lot of money.”

If I only provide for Nox, Stella and Luna might not take it well. Being older sisters, they’re stronger, and it wouldn’t be hard for them to put pressure on Nox, so I was careful.

It’s a relief if Iris and Selin just sulk.

“Oh, how did we end up having so many kids?”

Finally, I picked out a toy for Io as well. That made a total of four.

Stretching, I gave a hint, and Hamin, who was sweating a bit, made a retaliatory pout.

“…I’m not the only one.”

“I have no arguments left.”

I had my own greed as well.

“But what about Stella and Luna?”

“They prefer receiving cash. They’ve taken to shopping… they like picking out necklaces themselves.”

Jewelry is like that.

While boys think any shiny thing is good, there are moments when designs that might not seem appealing to others catch their eye. The mere act of giving them that opportunity to choose becomes a gift itself.

“Shall we head back?”

“Yeah, we have to go back. Oh right, there was something else to buy.”

Clapping my hands, I turned my steps toward the food section.

**

On the weekend, Hamin and Kanna went to the market inside the walls. Though they went under the pretext of buying dinner, when they returned, there were more gifts than food.

“Wow! A soft bear plushie!”

Iris, who received a white bear plushie with short, dense fur and a soft texture, smiled brightly. Since there happened to be a ribbon, she tied it around the bear’s neck and named it “Anne.”

A heart-shaped pink plastic case. When she opened it, there was a button along with a mirror inside. When pressed, a sound rang out, playing the music that often plays when animated princesses appear.

“Wow, oh, oh!”

For some reason, Selin held onto the magic wand included in the princess set, and mesmerized by the sparkling light, spun around until she felt dizzy.

Leaving her younger sister behind, Nox blankly accepted the gloves his dad handed him.

“What’s this…?”

“You wear it like this and catch the balls that come flying.”

“…Is it mine?”

“It’s yours, Nox. If someone wants to play with you, you can lend them a glove.”

Two gloves and one ball.

Nox promptly handed one glove to his dad.

“Then can I try it just once?”

“Of course.”

As if he had been waiting, Hamin grasped a glove and showed it to Nox.

From how to insert his hand to how to catch the ball.

“This is how you catch it.”

Unlike regular gloves, he taught him how to effectively catch the ball.

“It’s not working well.”

“Then you need to twist your wrist like this. So the ball doesn’t slip out.”

“Ah…!”

With his small hands, he found it hard to fully utilize the glove, so he learned a trick. When he wore it entirely, he managed to grasp the ball.

The ball extending from the tip of Nox’s fingers. The ball, which followed a high arc, dropped into Hamin’s glove. A sound of the catch tickled Nox’s ears.

“Here it comes!”

Nox, feeling tense, remembered his dad’s appearance and watched the movements closely.

A high and slow ball. He fixed his gaze on the ball that was intentionally thrown high. Following Nox’s gaze, his hand lunged out to catch the ball.

Thud! With a small impact felt on his outstretched hand, Nox felt a sense of accomplishment.

It was just an ordinary game of catch, but having the equipment made it feel different.

“I-I’ll throw it!”

“Alright, throw it back!”

Father and son began a delightful interaction in the yard.

Meanwhile, inside the house where the gifting ceremony had ended, Kanna sat awkwardly.

“Mom, what about mine?”

“Mom.”

Since both preferred to choose themselves, it seemed better to give them allowance. That’s what I thought.

However, I hadn’t accurately measured how much to give, leading to a slight problem.

There’s no cash.

“I’ll give it to you later…”

“Mom! What about mine!!”

Luna shouted like she was having a seizure, while Stella silently stared at Kanna.

Kanna felt the weight of Stella’s piercing gaze more heavily than the shouting from beside her.

‘Puberty is scary.’

Although everyone goes through it, Stella’s recently sensitive behavior felt a bit burdensome.

It was inevitable to feel anxious with so much to pay attention to.

Yet, having no words wasn’t surprising because she had to take care of her younger siblings when she was in elementary school.

Even though Habar existed, it must have been quite burdensome for Stella, so Kanna remained quiet.

She didn’t want to say anything that would invite Stella’s resentment.

“Next time. It’s just that I don’t have money right now. Really, really. I’ll increase your allowance next month.”

“Really? Just a bag once.”

Stella let out a sigh, seemingly resigned, while Luna clung to Mom, refusing to give up.

Ch. 219 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 219

The eldest child receives the expectations and love of their parents in one body, but at the same time, the responsibility is a position that comes with it.

Especially if there are siblings instead of being an only child, that burden increases proportionally.

Stella Aurora was exactly in such a position. At the point where she embraced more siblings than others, it could be said that there was no child bearing a weight greater than Stella.

This was something Stella herself recognized.

“…Ugh.”

It was somewhat understandable to look after Luna, who was one year younger, and Nox, who was ten years old.

It could also be understood, in a way, with Iris, who was just entering elementary school, and Selene, who was waiting behind her. After all, if you look at TV, it was common to see families with five siblings during the generation of mom and dad.

It was enough to accept the fact that she was in such a position.

However, looking at three-year-old Io made those thoughts gradually fade away.

‘Does having siblings just keep happening…?’

The moment Stella saw Habar taking care of Io, she was suddenly gripped with fear, feeling a bit anxious about her own situation.

The question was how siblings came to be.

Although she was young, as she grew older, she began to learn things she had not known before. The things taught in school to help defenseless children protect themselves came back to Stella as somewhat shocking truths.

When she realized that siblings weren't picked up from under bridges or brought by storks, she did gasp, but could quickly accept it.

At least she had already known that they come from their mother's womb.

However, when she learned why the belly swells, it was a bit of a shock.

Thinking about how siblings kept appearing made it a bit hard to accept.

After learning all that, she started to worry about having more siblings.

At such a young age, the concern of having to take care of younger siblings took precedence. While she wasn't specifically responsible for taking care of them, the reality of being the eldest daughter meant she couldn't help but be cautious if a younger sibling appeared.

There was something untrustworthy about all those beneath her.

She ruffled her hair, stopped, and tidied it up again.

Gathering her thoughts, she organized what she wanted to do.

"Sis, is something bothering you these days?"

"…Luna."

Before she could collect herself, Luna approached Stella and subtly checked her expression.

As the vacation was nearly over, she was worried about her sister not looking well.

Since they lived under the same roof, she felt a determination to try and resolve this frustrating situation as the second eldest.

Stella exhaled deeply.

“It’s something you don’t need to know.”

“What do you mean? I’m just worried and asking.”

“You don’t need to know.”

After worrying for her, she only received indifference in return.

“Sis!”

“Go away!”

“Eek!”

Although Luna yelled out angrily, the gap of just one year in their young age was considerable enough that she had no choice but to retreat.

Pouting and clicking her tongue, Luna shook her head.

This wasn’t something she usually did. Complaining, she left the room.

And outside, she advised Nox, who was peeking, with the gesture of slitting her throat to stay away.

“Why is sister like that? Is she going through menopause?”

“It’s puberty, not menopause.”

“Nox!!”

Luna’s incredulous words followed by the shouting heard from within the room chilled Nox’s bl**d.

“Oh, so you heard? We’re doomed.”

“You’re dead.”

“Just run away, ack!”

Nox tried to escape to the first floor where mom and dad were, but was quickly tripped up by Luna’s foot.

The door burst open, and Stella’s hand reached out toward Nox.

“Ah! My little sister did it! Where did she go?”

“Come here!”

Grabbing Nox by the leg as he was down, he yelped in terror, trying to dig his fingers into the floor. There was no way there would be a spot to grab hold of on the smooth floor.

As she went down the stairs and peeked back, Luna trembled her head at the screams emanating from the room.

“Oh, sis must be really mad.”

“Sis, sis. What are you doing?”

Iris casually showed off the teddy bear she had just received as a gift while trying to engage in conversation.

When she reached halfway up the stairs and glanced at Iris looking up at her, her gaze shifted.

“…It seems the big sister is feeling troubled right now.”

She wasn’t actually angry. It was just Nox who made her angry.

“What about brother?”

“Brother? The big sister is angry, and he’s being scolded over there.”

“Ah… I wanted to play with dolls. I don’t want to get in trouble.”

Worried that she might catch some backlash, Iris immediately went down the stairs.

Regardless of her young age, she should be credited for her ability to sense danger.

“I want to watch.”

Luna clicked her tongue and followed Iris down the stairs.

She judged that staying here wouldn’t lead to anything good.

**

That night, Kanna flinched at Hamin’s careful touch.

It was common for one side to hold her while sleeping, so she tried to go with it, but this time felt a bit different. She couldn’t help but be somewhat attentive to the subtle contact.

“…Is this how it feels?”

“A bit.”

“Then hold on a little longer.”

They said that as women age, their s*xual desire peaks, while men’s s*xual desire declines, but it didn’t seem to be just that way. It felt like both could partake if they really wanted to.

It wasn’t impossible, but Kanna subtly turned her body to evade his touch.

“…Stella was so shocked not long ago, you couldn’t hold back…”

As she let out a small laugh, Hamin groaned and smacked his lips.

“Did you realize while getting water…?”

“There’s nothing else I would come down to the first floor for, is there?”

“Ah… with the kids getting bigger, I feel more conscious.”

Hamin repositioned himself to shake off his thoughts and lay down. He turned his face toward the ceiling, closing his eyes, and felt himself calming down slowly.

Kanna shifted her upper body, rustling.

She gazed intently at Hamin’s face immersed in the darkness.

“What’s wrong?”

Kanna, who had been silently looking at Hamin, began to carefully ponder something.

Considering the possibility that appearance might be one reason for the persistence of s*xual desire even as they aged crossed her mind.

“…Since we came out, don’t you think we age slowly?”

“Slowly aging? Ah, I suppose it does feel a bit like that. We look youthful.”

Perhaps it was due to confronting the unrefined magical power wandering outside the walls. It was a slightly cautious statement, as it could just be a hereditary trait of looking young.

What if, by stepping outside, their youth was preserved for a long time?

Facial features and body shape. If those things maintained their longevity, wouldn’t that be why their s*xual desire towards each other didn’t fade? It was a thought prompted by Hamin’s touch, which felt habitual rather than affectionate.

For having six children, her body wasn’t in bad shape…

She touched herself and assessed her figure. Even when she put on weight once, it quickly returned to normal.

How wonderful it would be to still look young even at forty or fifty. Such thoughts crossed her mind, but she thought it might be problematic not to age at all.

Kanna chuckled and lay back down, pulling the blanket over her.

“Anyway, we have to be careful since Stella might freak out again if she hears about it.”

“Yeah, we should. …Until school starts?”

“Are you going to wait for that?”

“Not doing it for long is a bit awkward, isn’t it?”

Hamin’s words left Kanna baffled, and she let out a hollow laugh.

“If you really want to do that, why not do it quietly?”

“…Should I?”

“What do you mean, should you?”

When she shot him down coldly, he expressed disappointment with sounds of longing.

“There are six kids. What will we do if it increases?”

“…Well, that couldn’t be helped. It’s not like we’re short on money…”

“It’s not about the money; the problem is not having time to take care of the kids.”

Money wasn’t an issue, with grants, subsidies, and salaries.

But the thought of leaving the kids while both have jobs during a time when love is needed worried her. It felt irresponsible to leave the children with that reasoning.

There was a limit to relying on Habar as well.

No matter how tired and exhausted, the reason she devoted time to play with the noisy kids at home and made time during weekends when she wanted to rest all came from guilt.

She deeply wanted to do more for them, but that feeling settled in her heart and wouldn’t let go.

“Anyway, if we go for a seventh, Stella might run away.”

As Kanna said that to warn Hamin, he flinched.

Surely there wouldn’t be a father who would remain idle if his daughter were to run away. Nervously, Hamin glanced at Kanna.

“…Could she really run away?”

“Well, if they thought their mom and dad did such a thing, they’d be shocked.”

“Right, well… ah…”

He nearly became a doting father, but because he had too many daughters, Hamin simply became an ordinary dad, lifting his hands to wash his face repeatedly.

That wouldn’t erase his worries.

The answer was clear. The weight of being a head of the family was not meant to be taken lightly.

Yet he couldn’t resolve it, leaving Kanna to watch him struggle helplessly.

“It’ll be March soon, so just endure.”

“It’s still January, though.”

“It’s soon, what are you talking about?”

January was already halfway through, and February was a bit short.

Once March arrived, thinking about the kids who had to go to school made time feel like it was flying by.

“I’ll go to Iris’s entrance ceremony. You go to Stella’s entrance ceremony.”

“…Okay, got it. I’ll take a break that day.”

“That’s right.”

You can’t favor one over the other, and creating resentment will leave scars for life.

Hence, in a household with six children, parents have no choice but to run around constantly.

“…Hey.”

“No.”

“I haven’t said anything yet.”

“Just sleep.”

Kanna closed her eyes, leaving Hamin feeling dejected behind her.

Ch. 220 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 220

Taking uncontrolled children somewhere was quite a burden for parents.

With only two parents but six children, it was clear that caring for them was limited, especially with Io just starting to walk.

So, when it came time to go to the grocery store, I would pause and think for a moment about what to do.

In the end, I usually concluded to take the small car again and make several trips back and forth.

“School season is approaching, so there’s a lot to prepare…”

Other than that, I had to prioritize buying new school bags for Stella and Iris, who were starting school this time. School bags are good enough to last, but with a change in schools, I didn’t want them to be looked down upon.

When kids are young, even having one little thing can make them a target for teasing, so I had to pay attention to these details.

Hamin, who was watching from the side, mumbled as he examined bags one by one. It didn’t matter how much it cost; it seemed he wanted to check the performance of the bags to see what was good for the kids.

He couldn’t keep his hands off the zipper, constantly fiddling with it.

“…Well, it might not be bad to check after the kids choose.”

There was no need to sift through all those bags at the store, so I wondered when all of that would get done.

“Oh, right. What kind of bag does Stella like?”

“Um.”

Even the picky Stella had to be careful choosing a bag that she would use for at least one or two years. Standing next to her dad, she grabbed a bag and tilted her head in confusion.

Iris, who was watching her from the side, tugged at my skirt and looked up at me intently.

“What bag do you like, Iris?”

“Um… this one.”

Her decision didn’t take long. I could see why she chose that bag.

A small bunny plush attached to the end of the pink bag. The design was hard to find elsewhere and seemed like a good material.

The size was slightly small, likely to be attached to a keychain, but it looked like it wasn’t just for sale.

In short, it was a special plush that could only be acquired by buying this bag.

Whether Iris sensed that or was captivated by the bunny’s shape, she stared intently and couldn’t take her eyes off it. Even standing next to her dad, she gazed at it longingly and, unable to hold back, reached out her hand.

She touched it lightly a couple of times, and since no one said anything, she finally grabbed it with both hands and started squeezing its cheeks.

It was soft yet seemed to have a slight bounce, so it was clear that she liked the sensation.

Before asking for it, she was already enchanted by the plush, rubbing it against her cheek and looking very busy.

“Are you going to go with that, Iris?”

“Ah, yes! I want this one!”

There was a strong determination in her little hands, expressing that she would not let go.

A smile crept over me, seeing such determination not proportional to her hand size.

“Then Stella just needs to choose. You can take your time.”

“Um…”

Stella held the bag tightly and stared at it.

Black was pretty, but for Stella, who usually wore dark clothes, it felt too dark. And choosing a bag with white mixed in was challenging because it was hard to find a design she liked.

It seemed Stella felt the same way as she grabbed one bag, dug around a bit, and then put it down repeatedly.

“Blue is no good, red is…”

The red was not too bad.

Given her dark hair and purple eyes, adding a bright bag would certainly bring a more cheerful vibe.

Nodding my head, Stella’s hands became busy. Just a moment ago, her fingers were moving lazily as if she didn’t like anything; now they were moving around quickly.

She even picked up bags to look at them from different angles, checking in

the mirror as to how they looked on her shoulder, showing a proactive attitude.

Then, looking satisfied, she raised the bag high and stared at it with both hands.

“I’ll go with this one.”

“Really? Can you use it for three years?”

It didn’t have to be exactly three years. If it got worn out or damaged, it would need to be replaced.

It was a difficult thing to explain to the kids, but if I told them that they needed to change bags because one had gotten ruined, it could get complicated. Especially when a new semester started and a new bag was needed, we’d already be facing the issue of needing to buy bags for five kids.

What would I do if Io grew up and asked for a bag? Such realistic problems cluttered my mind.

I couldn’t voice these worries, which were natural for parents.

It was moments like these that made me realize how expensive raising many kids could be.

“I feel like I could use this for ten years.”

“…There’s no need for that. By high school, what you want will change.”

It seemed like she had read my mind, mentioning ten years.

When it comes to junior high and high school, fashions change so quickly, often within a year, so just deciding to use something for a long time isn’t a good approach.

Whether she knew it or not, Stella was humming a tune, far from her previously prickly personality.

“Now that we’ve bought a bag… we should also get school supplies?”

Truly, it’s just places to spend money…

The money Hamin and I earn together isn’t small. You could say it’s quite a lot.

Since we’re working to expand land for the country’s next projects, we cannot be paid less.

Yet, with so many places to spend that money, it disappears quickly, leaving just a little behind.

It’s not good to be worrying about retirement at such a young age, but at this rate, with those kids grown up, I fear I’ll have to rely on them again.

But when I actually took them out, watching the kids looking around, trying to figure out what they liked was a pleasing sight. Even with the worries about money, my gaze turned into one wishing for the kids to simply be happy without being tied to money.

This time, Hamin took Iris to check out notebooks and pencils.

Stella, who had been glancing at them from the side, subtly reached out her hand.

“…Can I use this?”

“A mechanical pencil? Sure, you can use it.”

“Um.”

“Why? Are you worried about something?”

“No, it just looked nice, but before, the teacher told us to only use pencils…”

She seemed curious but questioned whether it was okay to use.

After all, if she just bought it and was told not to use it, she couldn’t even do her homework with it, which could turn into a burden quickly.

It’s hard for kids to endure situations where they have tools they can’t use.

Well, adults face similar situations, I suppose.

Buying a computer but not being able to turn it on? Something like that?

“That probably happens for several reasons… but by the time you enter middle school, it won’t matter.”

“Is that so?”

Stella’s eyes sparked slightly.

Iris, who had crept over, fixed her gaze on the mechanical pencil Stella was holding, her eyes gleaming. It seemed she was drawn more to the variety in the mechanical pencil’s designs than the pencil itself.

There were ordinary-looking mechanical pencils, but there were also ones shaped like teddy bears.

Such designs were hard to find with regular pencils.

Pencils only colored in don’t have many fancy details since they are consumables that get sharpened and diminished quickly; they lack any big embellishments. Seeing them as disposable makes it seem pointless to have something pricey that lacks practicality.

But for mechanical pencils, since only the lead is used up, having cute designs could be acceptable.

“I want to, I want to…”

That was what instantly captured Iris’s attention.

In a way, it was surprising to see that the tastes of daughters and sisters weren’t alike. Stella had a certain laid-back quality to her personality, being somewhat androgynous, while Iris loved playing with dolls. She seemed to have ambitions to hold onto a cute, small world.

Considering the kingdom of dolls atop Iris’s bed, it wasn’t too hard to guess.

Luna liked to beautify herself as she was, while Selene enjoyed dolling up as a princess. It felt less about loving the princess and more about loving her identity as a princess.

Since everyone had different tastes, it was hard to see them playing together. Even when they did, it felt like the sisters adjusted to their younger sibling.

Now that I think about it, I haven’t seen Stella and Luna playing with the kids lately.

Not that they had to, but it seemed like only Nox had been playing with Iris and Selene recently. Tracing those memories, I soon caught sight of Iris having been stopped by their dad.

“I want to, I want to…!”

“Iris, you need to use a pencil first. You have to use this type to learn how to write.”

“But I can use a mechanical pencil, right? Eh?”

It was a plea tinged with unfairness, but there was no choice.

Stella had also been prohibited from using mechanical pencils in elementary school, so it was unavoidable.

If the teacher says not to, it’s best not to do it.

As long as it isn’t something too strange, respecting the teacher’s authority is reassuring for parents sending their kids to school.

I just hoped my child wouldn’t grow up to disregard the teacher’s words and be defiant.

“Iris will use a pencil for now, and if the teacher says it’s okay, we can buy it then. Okay? Iris, if you get something and then can’t use it, it will feel unfair, right?”

“Ugh…”

“How about your dad plays dolls with you for the first time in a while? Right?”

Having difficulty convincing Iris, I quickly pulled out the cheat key.

As Hamin was bewildered, Iris grabbed at that rope.

“Really?”

Hamin hesitated for a moment upon seeing that, and sighed before Iris could start crying.

“Right. Well…”

Due to the issue of not being able to play properly during weekdays because of work, I had to take care of them often during the weekends. It wasn’t just supervising either; keeping up with the kids’ imagination while playing dolls was hard work, but it was something that needed to be done as a parent.

There’s no other choice. That’s just Hamin’s destiny.

Having a lot of kids doesn’t end there; this caring aspect is also part of a parent’s responsibility.

Ch. 221 I Became the Last Place in the Academy – Chapter 221

The entrance ceremony originally belongs only to the students.

Still, since it’s the beginning for them, I thought I could at least take them to the front gate. Moreover, Iris was attending her first school, so there was a need to ease her nerves, which were tightly wound.

New backpack, school supplies.

School, teachers, friends.

Everything is new. There might be anticipation and excitement, but it is natural to feel nervous at first.

In a situation where one doesn’t know if the first step taken is stable or not, jumping into a new environment isn’t an easy task.

But this is also an experience, a small preparation for entering society.

“Iris, how do you feel about going to school this time?”

I drove the car into the driveway.

It’s usually Hamin who drives, and I sit in the passenger seat, but today we had to move separately.

Stella is going to middle school now. It couldn’t be helped that I couldn’t take them all to elementary school.

I glanced at the rearview mirror. I hugged my bag tightly and held the doll attached to it, humming.

Iris blinked, as if she realized my question a bit late, and met my gaze through the mirror.

“…Do you have playtime with your doll?”

“Maybe not. Hmm.”

“Uh-huh…”

While it might have been okay in kindergarten, it’s tough to get playtime with dolls in elementary school.

A young child can’t help but be a little fussy, but I just hoped she wouldn’t fall too far behind compared to other kids.

Luna, sitting in the passenger seat, leaned over to look at Iris.

“There isn’t much playtime there. Anyway, first grade ends early, so if you listen well and finish quickly, it’s fine to play then. I did the same.”

“You’re right. I used to play soccer after finishing early. The older kids were busy, so I didn’t have anything to do anyway.”

Nox, sitting next to Iris, chimed in.

Without needing to console Iris, I was glad to see the siblings going to school together, encouraging each other well.

…It’s not only good, but it wasn’t at the point where the downsides overshadowed the positives.

It was bearable.

As long as there was some support, the current situation didn’t seem lacking.

After a few turns of the steering wheel, we arrived at the elementary school.

Thinking that in just a year Luna would graduate and then move on to middle school with Stella, evoked a sense of nostalgia.

With the school season just beginning, I wondered if it was premature to think about such a distant future, eliciting a wry smile.

“Okay, we’ve arrived. Get out now!”

“Get out, get out!”

Luna mimicked my words like a parrot. She unbuckled her seatbelt and climbed out of the car with her bag. Having swung the strap over her shoulder, she glanced back at me.

“I’ll see you later!”

“Have a good day. Take care of Iris!”

“Okay, I just need to take her to her class, right?”

“Yeah, I trust you, my daughter.”

Iris, fiddling with her doll, finally got out a bit late. Nox, who had been sitting quietly in the corner, nodded his head and stepped out of the car.

“Yeah, yeah. Nox and Iris, have a good day.”

“Okay~”

With the children’s characteristic leisurely responses, the back door was completely shut.

“Phew…”

Just taking them there drained me. I can understand why children are always bubbling with energy, perhaps because they siphon off their parents’

energy.

Leaning slightly on the steering wheel, I let out a sigh and gathered my thoughts.

With all the girls except Nox, managing their hair was a task. If our house wasn’t large enough with just one bathroom, it might have been a real issue.

The time spent washing, drying, trimming, and grooming.

Luckily, since Luna could manage on her own to some extent, but thinking about Io growing up…

Ugh.

I pressed the pedal and turned the steering wheel. Since I had finished everything I needed to in the morning, it was time to return to work.

**

Stella, entering middle school for the first time, also felt nervous.

It was entirely different from just moving up a grade in elementary school. If she were to recall the first time entering elementary school… it was too long ago to remember for comparison.

The new building, teachers, seniors, and friends.

It was different from the elementary school days, where familiar friends would scatter and meet again.

Although there were a few friends from elementary school, she couldn’t meet them right away at the entrance ceremony.

She gripped the straps of her bag tightly and tried to maintain her calm.

Finding her assigned class, she opened the door quietly.

The kids who were already inside stopped chatting and looked towards the door as it opened.

In a carefree atmosphere that felt like any seat was fine, she glanced around a bit.

Then she spotted a friend she recognized from elementary school a bit late.

“Oh, Stella!”

“Kali.”

Kali also looked a bit awkward on her own, immediately waving happily when she saw Stella.

Seeing that made Stella realize she wasn’t the only one feeling shy, which gave her a little confidence. She thought that it would be fine as long as she made friends naturally.

“Thank goodness. I thought no one would be here.”

“Yeah, I felt a bit lost on my own too. Everyone from the same elementary school is chatting away…”

She agreed with Kali’s relieved remark.

It was true that this school was quite a distance from her first elementary school, but she never thought she’d feel so isolated. Of course, just because the elementary school was the same didn’t mean everyone knew each other.

“…What will we learn in middle school? I’m not good at harder subjects.”

Kali pouted her lips.

“You’ll get used to it as you go along. I decided to be content just having you here today.”

“That’s sweet. I really cannot do without you.”

Stella said it nonchalantly, but Kali clasped her hands in delight.

Stella had black hair and purple eyes. She radiated an air of elegance that felt like a character out of a story.

Even during the entrance ceremony, she maintained her distance, glancing occasionally but never daring to approach.

In elementary school, all the children were friends, but as time passed, she matured a bit faster than the others.

Now that she was in middle school, the atmosphere was distinctly different, filled with kids who were also debating whether to approach her.

There was a vibe that made it feel like they wanted to speak but couldn’t.

After entering the classroom and talking with Kali, the wall that had seemed to exist between them felt a little less.

“Alright, everyone, attention please.”

As everyone was talking with previous friends and looking for new ones, the teacher entered, knocking on the attendance book, prompting everyone to return to their seats.

It was the moment Stella’s first middle school class began.

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“…Did Stella say she was going to the dorms?”

After returning home, the thought struck me as I saw Hamin sitting on the sofa, I blurted it out.

This was due to a comment I had made in frustration earlier. Now that she was actually sending her to school, I realized I hadn’t considered it thoroughly. I didn’t think we had gone through any specific procedures to enter the dorm.

As we stared blankly at each other, Hamin’s hand lifted slightly.

It seemed he was thinking about the idea, as his finger twitched.

“I haven’t heard anything yet, but they might give us some information at school.”

“Oh, so we didn’t apply in advance.”

“It should come via the home communication letter, I think. We might have to wait a bit to find out.”

Since I had never used a school dorm before, I didn’t know much. If Stella was going to the dorms, it would be more convenient than commuting.

It felt a bit strange for a fourteen-year-old to leave home with just a wall in between, but considering her composure, it didn’t seem like an issue worth worrying about.

“Well then, it looks like we can wait calmly.”

Having sent all the kids off to kindergarten, elementary school, and now middle school, the house became quiet.

Only Habar and Io remained, creating a calm atmosphere.

While a lively environment with children is nice, this quiet isn’t so bad either. It could be regarded as a brief moment of peace.

Either way, it was the only respite granted to parents.

I wouldn’t have long before I needed to head to work.

“Aren’t you going to work?”

“I’m taking a break for a while.”

“Oh, I never heard that.”

How could you suddenly take a break when I hadn’t heard anything about it?

“It’s fine because I just have to wait for the results. I found some time to rest before starting a new project. Though it’s a bit forced.”

“I envy that… I don’t have time to rest since work is work.”

“Well, soon you might get to rest. As machines develop and all, the workload might reduce. The machines will take care of it.”

Really?

But what would happen to money if there was no work?

Isn’t it because both of us are earning that we can support the expenses of raising six siblings?

If the source of income disappears, that would be troubling, and I made a slight pout.

In response, Hamin quickly got up from the sofa, indicating I didn’t need to worry about that now.

“Well then, I’m going to see Io, so you take care.”

“…Ugh.”

So envious.

Still, I felt it was my duty to prepare to let people out beyond the walls. It wasn’t strange to consider it my destiny, so I quietly packed my things.

“And is it okay today?”

“…A bit later.”

“Tsk.”

As Hamin clicked his tongue, I clutched the car keys.

With a beep, I set out on my journey to work.